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# Human Rationality: A Defense of Subjective Deliberation

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HUMAN RATIONALITY:  
A DEFENSE OF SUBJECTIVE DELIBERATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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In

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By

Paul E. Cynar  
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## ABSTRACT

Moral Theories can often place implausible demands upon agents, and these demands generally provide the criteria for the denial of such theories. In his book, *On What Matters*, Derek Parfit provides a systematic critique of subjective theories, and concludes that normative demands generated through subject-given reasons are both highly implausible, and logically incoherent, and thus it is incumbent upon philosophers to recognize them as inept in creating normative force. Through an analysis of the *Deliberative Theory* of subjectivism, Parfit provides three arguments; the *Agony*, *All or None*, and *Incoherence* Arguments which he claims undermine subjective theories.

In this thesis I argue that Parfit is mistaken in his view that Deliberative Subjectivists do not have a plausible response to Parfit's critiques. Through the works of John Rawls, Bernard Williams, Michael Smith, and Christine Korsgaard, subjectivists can formulate a theory of deliberation which adequately responds to Parfit's challenges. By combining the use of procedural rules, subject-given desires, and pre-analytic moral intuitions, subjectivists can provide an account of normativity that does not depend upon ideal deliberation, and thus circumnavigates the challenges raised through Parfit's three arguments.

## INTRODUCTION

In his book, *On What Matters*, Derek Parfit presents a systematic critique against subjective theories of normativity. Parfit develops four different formulations of subjectivism, *the Desire-Based Theory*, *the Telic Desire Theory*, *the Error-Free Desire Theory*, and the *Informed Desire Theory* before arriving at what he considers to be the most plausible and coherent version of subjectivism: the *Deliberative Theory*. The *Deliberative Theory*, which depends upon fully informed rational deliberation, appears to be the most plausible version of subjectivism, but its apparent internal consistency, according to Parfit, is due to its similarity to objective theories. The *Deliberative Theory* only appears to be plausible since the claims which subjectivists make through its use are similar to those that are generated through object-given theories.

Although there are similarities in the reasons produced through the Deliberative Theory and Objectivist account of reasons, there is, however, a fundamental difference in how reasons are generated respectively through subject and object-given theories. The primary difference between the two types of theories is based upon the types of rationality that proponents of each theory appeal. Subjectivists appeal exclusively to rationality centered on procedural rules. The normative reasons generated through subject-given theories are based upon *how* we make our choices, and thus are primarily concerned with our deliberative processes. Objectivist theories, contrarily, appeal not only to *how* we make our choices, but also about *what* we actually choose. Object-given theories appeal to facts about the objects which we choose, and derive normativity out of those relevant facts.

Because Subjectivists only appeal to deliberative rules of procedure, Parfit claims that their theories can only ever be *procedurally rational*,<sup>1</sup> whereas Objectivists appeal to both *procedural rationality*, and also, what Parfit calls, *substantive rationality*, (62) (those choices based upon facts). Since substantive rationality is not consistent with subjectivist theories, and thus principally unavailable for use in their justifications, subject-given theories often produce implausible or incoherent reasons which are unacceptable. These unacceptable reasons are generated out of the desires of agents who have desires for certain events which, no matter how implausible they may seem, Parfit claims, subjectivists must grant as normatively significant. Parfit contends that subjective theories do not have a plausible response to the Humean problem of desire (that all desires generate reasons), and thus subject-given theories produce many accounts of reasons which we in fact do not have.

Objective theories, according to Parfit, do not generate implausible reasons, such as those of subject-given theories, because they do not just appeal to *how* we make our choices, but also *what* we choose. Object-given theories are not confined to merely procedural considerations, they may instead appeal to relevant facts about what we choose, and thus can make substantive claims about what we ought to do. By appealing to facts, which provide substantive justifications, as well as procedural rationality, Parfit believes that object-given theories provide a more coherent foundation for normativity.

Parfit claims, however, that subject-given theories are not merely less plausible than object-given account, they are false in two distinct ways: first, subjectivists cannot distinguish between those desires which generate reasons, and those which do not, and second, when

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, 62. Complete bibliographical details for this Thesis are provided in the Bibliography. Henceforth, numbers in parenthesis in this thesis refer to this book.

subjectivists appeal to fully informed deliberation (as they do in the Deliberative Theory) they are actually invoking object-given facts, and thus fail to be subject-given theories.

Through what Parfit calls *the Agony Argument* and *All or None Argument*, he presents the inability of subjective theories to mitigate, and avoid the Humean problem. Instead, Parfit contends that subjectivists must claim that either all desires are capable of producing reasons, or none are. If subjectivists accept the former, then normativity would encompass all desires, and thus is a useless convention. Yet, if subjectivists accept the latter, as Parfit claims they should, then they cease to be subjectivists, but are rather adhering to some version of object-given reasons. Parfit contends that the latter is the only plausible option open to subjectivists, and through the *Incoherence Argument* claims that this is in fact the route that most subjectivists, specifically deliberative subjectivists, such as Bernard Williams, John Rawls, and Michael Smith take.

I will contend, however, that Parfit has a very limited understanding of what deliberative subjectivists are capable of accomplishing through the use of procedural rationality. I believe, instead, that deliberative subjectivists are under no obligation to accept the demand of *fully informed* deliberation, and that by replacing this demand, imposed by Parfit; they can provide a coherent account of normativity based exclusively upon procedural rules. I will draw upon the works of the aforementioned Williams, Rawls, and Smith to show that there are categorical demands placed upon rational agents, and that these demands fulfill the role of full information, thereby removing the necessary use of object-given facts which Parfit believes accompanies the use of fully informed deliberation.



By removing the need for ideal deliberation, such as Parfit views it, I believe that a more robust account of subjective deliberation can be provided. This robust account allows for a rejection of Parfit's arguments about the falsity of Subjective Normativity, and thus allows subjectivists to maintain subject-given reasons as a plausible normative option. I do not specifically engage the debate of whether subject-given accounts of normativity are more plausible than object-given ones, but through this thesis it should be possible to see that Parfit's critiques of subjectivism can be met in a substantial way, and that Parfit's arguments do not in fact provide a fatal objection to subjectivism.

## CHAPTER 1: SUBJECTIVE NORMATIVITY

In the first volume of his book *On What Matters*, Derek Parfit presents an account of morality which grounds normativity solidly within an Objectivist framework. For Parfit, what we have reason to do ultimately derives from what certain relevant facts dictate in any situation. These facts should be seen as exclusively object-given, since they are about the objects of our desires, and are telic<sup>2</sup> in nature. Therefore, when making moral claims, Parfit concludes that we must reject subjective theories, which ground normativity in facts that appeal exclusively to our “present desires, aims, and choices.” (58)

According to Parfit, reasons which are instrumental, or are conditionally dependent upon telic desires, are unable to generate normative force, and as such should be regarded as impotent in creating obligation. Since instrumental or conditionally dependent reasons, which are based upon desire, are unable to provide normative reasons, Parfit claims that we must reject subjective notions of normativity. I believe that this rejection of desire-based reasons overlooks fundamental characteristics of rational human ontology, but my immediate purpose is not to refute Parfit’s account of normativity, but rather to present an exegetically accurate account of Parfit’s rejection of subjective theories.

For Parfit, subjectivist theories of morality focus on our present desires and aims when establishing normativity. These theories “appeal to facts” about how we produce reasons which are generated exclusively out of “present desires, aims, and choices.” (58) Although there are wide-ranging accounts of subjective notions of right action, Parfit begins with what he sees as the most basic subjective theory which can be formulated as follows,

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<sup>2</sup> Parfit defines telic desires as those which we have “when we want some event as an end.” (58)

*The Desire-Based Theory*: We have a reason to do, whatever would fulfill any of our present desires. (58)

This formulation of Subjectivism implies that we have reasons to act upon any present desires, that implication, however, must be seen as false. If all desires generated normative reasons, then we would be committed to acting upon desires which are contrary to some of our actual long-term goals or aims. Rather, "For subjective theories to be plausible... they must admit that some desires do not give us reasons." (58) For example

Suppose that, while walking in some desert, you have disturbed and angered a poisonous snake. You believe that, to save your life, you must run away. In fact you must stand still, since this snake will attack only moving targets. (34)

If we accept the *Desire-Based Theory* the agent who is confronted with the poisonous snake must claim that he has a reason to run away which is generated by his current desire to run away. This current desire is, however, based off a false belief and will not accomplish his supposed end of not dying. Presumably, if he correctly understood that running away would cause the snake to bite, he would not maintain his present desire to run away. Instead, he would desire to stay still since that is the only way to save his life. However, if the *Desire-Based Theory* is correct, this fully informed desire of not running is not open to this agent because it is not his *present* desire, and thus fails to generate a reason for action. It seems highly implausible that the agent confronted with the snake can claim that he had a reason to run, since this reason is only used as a means to accomplish his goal of saving his life. Yet, if the agent has a

desire to run, and this desire is incapable of generating a reason, this seems to seriously hinder the subjectivist claim that reasons are dependent upon our present desires and aims.<sup>3</sup>

Since subjectivist theories depend upon desires in order to generate reasons, yet some desires are unable to provide reasons, there must be a way to distinguish between the two. This is done by drawing a distinction between telic desires, and instrumental desires. Parfit claims that “Desires are *telic* when we want some event as an end, or for its own sake, and *instrumental* when we want some event as a means to some end.” (58) This distinction allows us to claim that when considering instrumental desires, we do not have a desire for the thing which is instrumental, but rather due to its ability to provide us the thing which is the actual source of our desire. Instrumental desires do not provide reasons because they are merely a conduit to fulfill our actual desires. If there were other equally plausible ways to fulfill these desires, we may have no preference for any one instrument, and thus our desire in wanting this thing holds only insofar as it allows us to achieve some other end. We do not therefore have a desire for this instrumental thing independently, or for its own sake, and thus we should reject the notion that these desires provide reasons.

Desires that are instrumental thus fail to generate reasons; rather, instrumental desires should be seen as components of those reasons that are generated in response to a given telic desire. Of the two types of desires, only telic desires generate reasons for action, and so we can reformulate the *Desire-Based Theory* as,

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<sup>3</sup> As will be claimed in Chapter 3, this is what will be explained as the Humean Problem. Since David Hume held the view that all desires generate reasons, the name of this problem is attributed to him. It is important to note here, that the contention Parfit invokes against this problem is that we should see it as an implausible feature of Subjective notions of normativity that all desires generate reasons. If we accept that all desires generate reasons we would often have reasons to perform many actions which run contrary to any plausible conception of right action, but yet nevertheless we have a desire to perform., and therefore according to Hume a reason to do.

*The Telic Desire Theory:* We have most reason to do whatever would best fulfill or achieve our present telic desires or aims. (59)

This formulation of Subjectivism correctly implies that it is ultimately only our telic desires that provide reasons. However, within the parameters of the *Telic-Desire Theory* listed above, in cases where our aims depend on false beliefs, we arrive at unsatisfactory conclusions. For example, as Parfit writes, "I might want to hurt you...because I falsely believe that you deserve to suffer, or because I want to avenge some injury that I falsely believe you have done me." (60) In such cases if the Telic Desire Theory is correct I would correspondingly have a reason to hurt you because that conforms to my telic desire, but this is a conclusion which seems illogical, since I, in fact, have no reason to hurt you since my desire is wrong or misplaced.

To avoid cases such as the one above, Subjectivists may appeal to desires which are error-free or which are dependent upon true beliefs. Through an appeal to desires free from error, the *Telic-Desire Theory* can be reformulated as,

*The Error-Free Desire theory:* We have most reason to do whatever would best fulfill or achieve our present error-free telic desires. (60)

The error-free telic formulation of the *Desire-Based Theory* avoids the necessitation that all desires provide reasons because it appeals only to those desires which are error-free. In situations like the above example, although I have a desire to harm you, this desire is based on a false belief and thus does not generate a reason to act upon my misinformed desire.

Although this formulation avoids the overbroad encompassing of all desires of the *Desire-Based Theory*, as well as the susceptibility to false beliefs of the *Telic-Desire Theory*, it is still fairly weak in its current state. The Error-Free Desire Theory can be strengthened in a

significant way with a further distinction: that our desires be *fully* informed. We have already seen that desires that are based on false belief provide insufficient grounding for reasons, but we should also recognize that desires based on ignorance succumb to this critique as well. For example, in the case in which I want to cause you harm, “I might believe falsely that you have intentionally injured me; or, though believing truly that you have injured me, I might not know that your aim was to save me from some greater injury.” (60) In such cases I cannot appeal to my false belief of your intention to injure me, since unbeknownst to me you did not intend to inflict injury upon me. Furthermore, there is something intuitively wrong with claiming that I actually ought to fulfill my ignorant desire to harm you when this ignorance is about the fact that the harm you did me was designed to keep me from greater injury. In this case, I would not have erred in my assessment of the fact that you harmed me, but I would be ignorant of the greater harm I was saved from by your action. For this reason it seems most plausible to appeal to telic desires that are fully informed as well as free from error. An appeal to fully-informed desire generates,

*The Informed Desire Theory*: we have most reason to do whatever would best fulfill the telic desires or aims that we would now have if we knew all of the relevant facts. (61)

The appeal to the *Informed Desire Theory* involves, however, several problematic notions. First: through an appeal to “all of the relevant facts” it appears as though (1) all facts that may alter our present desires are relevant, and (2) by appealing to desire that is fully informed we are dismissing our actual desires in lieu of potential desires.

As Parfit claims (1) is too wide of a criterion. (61) Drawing upon an analysis by Allan Gibbard, we must restrict our requirement of being fully informed to only currently relevant

facts. For example, as Gibbard claims, if we were hungry and had the desire to eat, yet, “if we knew and vividly imagined the full facts about what is going on in the innards of our fellow-diners, we might lose our desire to eat.” (61) Instead we must restrict the scope of what fact must be considered to only those facts which have a bearing on our present desires, such as when experiencing the desire to eat, knowing the relevant facts of how to accomplish this in a plausible way. All facts that may affect a desire are not relevant, such as the gastro-intestinal status of a fellow diner when I have the desire of hunger, but rather only those which have a sufficiently useful bearing upon any present desire. Therefore we should restrict the use of relevant facts to those facts which if known would alter our desires. These facts, however, are logically linked with our desire in such a way that we would consider such a fact an immediately pertinent fact in determining what our present desire ought to be.

(2) is necessarily problematic to subjectivists since it dismisses an agent’s actual desires, and depends solely upon their potentially fully informed desires. Although plausible theories of morality depend upon ideal agents<sup>4</sup>, not merely actual agents, an appeal to fully informed desire eliminates the reason generating capacity of desire. If only fully informed desires are capable of generating reasons, then it becomes unclear as to how this account of subjectivism can plausibly be used in understanding normativity.

The *Informed Desire Theory* would depend upon omniscient beings in founding normativity, since only an agent who is fully informed may generate reasons for action, according to this theory. An agent lacking possession of the relevant facts may be able to align

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<sup>4</sup> Such an agent who is fully informed and fulfills an acceptable conception of rationality.

herself with what she would choose if she were fully informed, but lacking this fully informed state she could not generate reasons to act this way.

For example, if the previous agent who falsely wants to harm you decides out of a benevolent desire to refrain from injuring you, this would be in conformity with a fully informed state where she knew the relevant facts and knew that you were innocent. If we suppose the fully informed agent would decide you should not be harmed, this generates a reason for them not to harm you. The same cannot be said about their newly found benevolent nature in an uninformed state. In the uninformed state the agent would believe that you are worthy of injury, but refrains from injuring you due to a benevolent impulse. This would fail to generate a reason for not harming you, since if the *Informed Desire Theory* is correct given the relevant facts she would not need to be benevolent since you are innocent of their rebuke. Although the uninformed and fully informed states would present the same outcome, according to this theory you could only have a reason to act in the fully informed state.

If fully informed desires are the singular type of desires that may generate reasons, and we wish to apply this subjective theory to actual agents, we arrive at an apparent inability to generate reasons of any kind. Since actual agents are distinguished from ideal agents in the simple fact that they lack the omniscient characteristic which we can assume for the ideal agent, the *Informed Desire Theory* although potentially applicable in theory, degenerates into a useless principle when applied to actual agents. Since by the very distinction of being actual agents, existent agents are unable to be fully informed, the *Informed Desire Theory* is at best a hypothetical theory that can have very little practical application.



Since the *Informed Desire Theory* depends upon a full understanding of the relevant facts, yet the definition of the relevant facts appear to be slightly ambiguous (1), and the acquisition of these facts is a dubious possibility (2), it is more plausible for subjectivists to redirect their focus from “what would best fulfill or achieve our desires or aims... to the choices or decisions that we would make after carefully considering the [relevant] facts.” (61) By focusing upon the choices or decisions we would make after ideal deliberation, when possessing all of the relevant facts, Subjectivists may be able to avoid the problems generated through (1) and (2), and thus maintain a subjective approach to reasons. According to what Parfit calls,

The *Deliberative Theory (DT)*: We have most reason to do whatever, after fully informed and rational deliberation, we would choose to do. (62)

Unlike the previous four versions of subjectivism DT does not appeal to desire, but rather what we would choose to do. Although what we may desire and what we would choose may often be similar or analogous, they may not always be, and because of this the DT at least partially avoids the objections of (1) and (2) above.

Since Parfit views DT as the strongest version of Subjectivism, and tailors many of his remarks to counter DT, I will explicate in detail here how it works, and how it differs from its apparent objectivist counterpart (C),

(C) What we have most reason to do, or decisive reason to do, is the same as what, if we were fully informed and rational, we would choose to do. (62)

DT states that “We have most reason to do whatever, after fully informed and rational deliberation, we would choose to do.” (62) Parfit claims that at first glance this is a view which

would be acceptable to Objectivists, since Objectivists may claim adherence to (C), which is strikingly similar to DT. Parfit concludes that this similarity is, however, at best “ambiguous,” since claiming that both Subjectivists and Objectivists may appeal to specific types of deliberation adds very little to any proposed distinction between the two.

Although DT and (C) appear to be ambiguously related we can distinguish them in a useful way due to the fact that DT is concerned with what we can rationally choose, and not merely about what we desire, like the other Subjectivist theories. Since DT focuses upon what we would rationally choose after careful deliberation, it appeals to a sense of rationality that is unavailable to the other theories, and thus shares a commonality with (C). The form of deliberation which DT depends upon is an adherence to certain types of procedural rules, or rather procedural rationality. As Parfit claims, “we ought to try to imagine fully the important effects of our different possible acts, to avoid wishful thinking, to assess probabilities correctly, and to follow certain other procedural rules.” (62) When we deliberate in ways which adhere to procedural rules about necessary instrumental actions we are *procedurally rational*.

DT claims that we have most reason to do what we would choose after fully informed and rational deliberation. In order to satisfy the requirement of rational deliberation an agent must meet certain rational limits when making choices. When choosing, in order to meet the standards of procedural rationality, “we ought to imagine fully the important effects of our different possible acts, to avoid wishful thinking, to assess probabilities correctly, and to follow certain other procedural rules.” (62) When pursuing our aims, whatever they may be, it is not only logical that Deliberative Subjectivists adhere to procedural rationality, but necessary, as Bernard Williams, one such subjectivist claims, when making choices, we must have “a desire

not to fail through error.” (77) Therefore, Subjectivists operating under the DT are acting rationally, and appear to be in conformity with (C)

As has been shown, Subjectivists must appeal to a deliberative process in a procedurally rational way. Procedural necessitations appear to be a minimal threshold for rationality, but appealing to procedural rules does not inherently imply that DT has the same qualifying reasons for support as the Objectivist, which adheres to (C). Instead, Parfit contends that Subjectivists are not truly in conformity with (C) since they are unable to depend upon substantive claims. Although Subjectivists may be acting rationally when following procedural rules, or acting with a consistency and adherence, for example, to the desire not to fail through error, they are excluded from substantive appeals since appeals to desire are devoid of object-given reasons.<sup>5</sup>

Since the Subjectivists cannot depend upon object-given reasons they must ground rational deliberation within the framework of consistency of action, or upon “*how* we make our choices.” (62) Therefore although Subjectivists would most likely accept (C) they would do so for a very different reason than Objectivists. Subjectivists would accept (C) because it is what an agent acting on subjective principles would desire to choose after ideal deliberation, Objectivists conversely would accept (C) because, as Parfit claims, there are object-given facts and acting upon (C) would then be what we have decisive reason to do, when in possession of these facts.

Objectivists appeal to procedural rationality, and it is because of this that (C) originally seems equally as pleasing to them, but Objectivists require a further standard in order to accept this claim. Unlike the Subjectivists, for the Objectivists it is not enough that we act procedurally

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<sup>5</sup> Object-given reasons will be fleshed out in chapter 2.

rationally and have consistency between our intentions and beliefs, we must also be substantively rational. To be substantively rational there must be object-given reasons which are derived from the relevant reason-giving facts. These facts are not open to Subjectivists since for Subjectivists reasons depend upon desires, and cannot be drawn from objectively given facts. "These people [Subjectivists] deny that we have such object-given reasons, and they appeal to claims that are only about procedural rationality." (62) Objectivists must not only follow the dictates of procedural rationality, but must also appeal to "strong and often decisive object-given reasons." (62)

We can more clearly distinguish these two viewpoints if we return to our snake example from earlier. According to the Objectivist the fact that running will cause the snake to attack, and thus bite me which will lead to my death, gives me a decisive reason to want to remain still, and as Parfit says, "If I were fully informed and substantively rational, that is what I would choose to do." (63) The Subjectivist reverses this relationship, and only claims that we have a decisive reason not to run after implementing the desire to not run, which is only possible after ideal deliberation. If after "fully informed and procedurally rational deliberation," (63) I would choose to not run, Deliberative Subjectivists would then agree that I have a decisive reason to not run.

However, the Subjectivist uses the fact that running will cause the snake to bite to inform their course of action, only after imposing their pre-existing desire to not die upon the situation. The Subjectivist can be seen to be procedurally rational since they have some desire (to not die) and the facts provide the right course of action to satisfy that desire (not running). Yet the decisive reason for the Subjectivist is only supplied in accordance with the consistency

between their intentions or desires (not to die) and their beliefs (that staying still will keep the snake docile).

Conversely, Objectivists instead rely foremost upon the fact that running will cause the snake to bite, but rather than just needing this to be procedurally rational and consistent with their intention (to not die), Objectivists must also submit this intention to the object-given fact that it is normatively true that we have reasons to live. These reasons are supplied by substantive object-given facts which are unobtainable for subjectivists, and thus cannot provide normative foundations.

Even though both Objectivists and Subjectivists ultimately accept (C), they do so for different reasons. “Objectivists appeal to normative claims about what, after ideal deliberation, we have *reasons* to choose, and *ought rationally* to choose. These [Deliberative] Subjectivists appeal to psychological claims about what, after such deliberation we *would in fact* choose.” (63) If Subjectivists, for example, lacked the desire to not die, even after ideal deliberation, they would be unable to claim decisive reason to not run, since subjectivists lack the ability to grasp object-given substantive reasons. Although most Subjectivists would presumably have the long-term aim to not die, since this is not a current desire (as will be seen in Chapter 2) they would not produce a reason to stand still, unless that was already a desire which they possessed. Objectivists, conversely, which lack the desire to live, would still be bound to object-given facts when deliberating, and as such ought to still decisively conclude a need to not run.

Parfit presents Deliberative Subjectivism as the most plausible subjective theory of reasons. However, according to Parfit, this theory fails to motivate substantive reasons because it depends wholly upon procedural accounts of normativity. Subjectivists “believe that *all*

practical reasons are desire-based, aim-based, or choice-based,” (65) and since this is so widely accepted, Parfit asks, “how could it be true that, as objective theories claim, there are *no* such reasons?” (65)

Parfit claims that there are many “partial explanations” for why so many people falsely believe that we can have desire, aim, or choice-based reasons. Since subjectivism is so widely held it is useful to explain why so many people accept this theory, even though, according to Parfit, we have no such subjective reasons.

Many of the reasons that subjectivists claim for why desire can be a normative tool are due to simple misunderstandings, or confusion about the basis for our reasons. First, for example, it is often the case that what we desire is valuable in its own right, and because of this, subjectivists may claim that it is then a substantive desire. This is false though; rather, we have an object-given reason to fulfill this desire, or to perform this action, and so although the subjectivist is right in claiming that we have a reason to act, it is due to an object-given fact, not a subject-given desire.

Second, we may have a desire “because we believe that we have such reasons.”(65) When we have a desire that is generated through the belief that we have reasons for action, any reason that may be generated is due to this belief, and not some desire that we may have (this will be clearly shown in Chapter 2). This approach confuses desire with belief, and mistakes desire for that which generates reasons in these circumstances.

Third, many people believe that desires which contribute to our well-being are in themselves good for us. Yet, what is truly good for us is the promotion of our well-being, and the desire which achieves this is merely an instrumental tool to satisfy this requirement. When

the fulfillment of a desire positively affects our well-being, we have reason to fulfill this desire solely because we have value-based reasons, not because a desire can be in itself good.

Fourth, many people do not distinguish between the fact that many desires produce motivational reasons for action, and the fact that these motivational reasons are not normative. Often these two forms of reasons are confused, even though motivational and normative reasons are distinctly disparate. (66)

Fifth, desires can be seen as normative when they are derivative in the sense that the reasons which they produce derive entirely from the facts that gave me my reasons to fulfill some desire. Therefore, although there are certain desires which are needed when trying to accomplish some substantive goals, these desires are contingently necessary, and thus do not fulfill the broader scope of normativity which Parfit is addressing when he is addressing our “primary, non-derivative reasons.” (66)

Sixth, “when we could fulfill *other people’s* desires or help these people to achieve their aims, these facts may give us non-derivative reasons to act in these ways.” (66) Even though many people often have desires which they have no reason to fulfill, when we help others in achieving their aims “we respect these people’s autonomy, and avoid paternalism.” (66) Since our autonomy is a substantive good which we need in order for normativity to be possible, we have substantive reasons to help others express autonomous action.

Seventh, people often confuse what we ought rationally to do with what we have reasons to do. Although, for example, it may be rational for the agent to run away from the snake, he does not have a reason to. We may act rationally in many situations where we are

ignorant of certain facts, but we are often acting in ways which are counter to what we have reason to do.

Eighth, we often claim to have reasons to fulfill some present desire that is aimed at future situations, or experiences that we believe we will enjoy. "But these reasons are provided, not by the fact that we would be fulfilling these desires, but by the fact that we would enjoy these future activities or experiences." (67) Instead, as we will see in the next chapter, "such facts give us reasons that are *hedonic* rather than *desire-based*." (67)

Ninth, some people falsely believe that hedonic reasons are desire-based. Whereas it will be shown in Chapter 2 that hedonic likings or dislikings are responses to sensations, and that when these people claim that our desires give us reasons they are in fact referring to our meta-hedonic desires.

Tenth, "we have many reasons for acting that we wouldn't have if we didn't have certain desires. But these reasons are provided, not by the facts that our acts would fulfill these desires, but by certain other facts that causally depend on our having these desires." (67) For example, when we play some games, "we have no reason to want to win. But if we do want to win, that may make it true that we would enjoy winning, and this second fact would then give us a reason to try to fulfill this desire." (68) As will be provided shortly, the 'second fact' that gives us reasons to fulfill this desire is provided by a value-based hedonic reason. Our desires may generate facts which provide reasons to fulfill these desires, but these facts although dependent upon the desires, are aimed at our having mental states that we enjoy. Since these desires then are derivative in the sense that they are aimed at the states which we enjoy (which



are value-based) these desires do not provide reasons, but rather achieving these positive mental-states is what provides reasons.

Many of the mistaken accounts of reasons which subjectivists hold revolve around confusion about the fact that our desires are usually derivative and thus although they provide us with motivating reasons, they do not provide normative reasons. We often have many reasons to fulfill our desires or aims, but these reasons are provided, “not by the fact that we would be fulfilling these desires or aims, but by such other *desire-dependent* or *aim-dependent* facts.” (69) Much of the time when subjectivists claim that desires or aims provide us with reasons, “it is often such other facts that they really have in mind.” (69) When many subjectivists hold plausible beliefs about which facts generate normative actions, “they have merely failed to see that these beliefs do not in fact support any subjective theory.” (70)

## CHAPTER 2: OBJECTIVE NORMATIVITY

As an Objectivist, Parfit depends upon the dualistic approach to rationality described in the previous chapter. This approach is comprised of an insistence upon substantive rationality in conjunction with procedural rationality when generating reasons for action. Although it will be shown that Parfit considers substantive rationality to be the foundation of normativity, we must nevertheless also be procedurally rational when acting on substantive facts, and thus these two must work in tandem to provide reasons for action. The task of this chapter will first be to differentiate these forms of rationality, followed by an analysis of how facts properly ground all of normativity.

As has been shown, procedural rationality is merely a rational coherence placed upon our means of achieving whatever aims we pursue. Procedural rules pertain to rationality only insofar as our actions coincide with what our intentions dictate. Procedural rationality often has very little to do with the aim of an individual, but rather with the means of achieving those aims. As Rawls claims, “knowing that people are rational, we do not know the ends they will pursue, only that they will pursue them intelligently.”<sup>6</sup>

It is possible, therefore, to be procedurally rational and yet act contrary to the aims that would exist if an agent was substantively rational. For example, the mistaken agent who falsely desires to injure another whom he believes wronged him may be procedurally rational when deciding and acting upon the best way to cause harm to the other, but he may in fact be acting counter to the desire which he would have if he possessed all of the facts. Therefore although procedural rules may be adhered to in a logical way, no matter their aims, it is because they

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<sup>6</sup> John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*. 49. Henceforth numbers in parenthesis with the prefix R in this thesis refer to this book.

lack substantive grounding that Subjectivists fail to provide normativity. Instead, as Parfit claims, in order to gain a substantive foundation for normativity we must base normativity not only upon what is rational, but upon object-given facts. These object-given facts are the underlying foundation for all reasons because they provide a basic irrefutable reality upon which normativity can be structured. Unlike procedural rules which provide hypothetical or conditional imperatives, substantive appeals depend upon object-given facts that are unconditioned and this provides a basis for morality that transcends the individual subjective aims that agents may have. Therefore, substantive appeals are capable of providing a normative framework which is independent of desire, and presents an agent with what they ought to do simply by appealing to the relevant reason-implying facts.

Since Parfit's account of normativity is established primarily through an appeal to substantive object-given facts, and these facts are what allow for the generation of reasons, it must be shown precisely how these facts supply us with reasons. In what follows I will present Parfit's account of objectivity as it pertains to reasons, and why reasons are inextricably linked with facts.

For Parfit, "the concept of a reason is indefinable in the sense that it cannot be helpfully explained merely by using words" (31), and as such the only way in which reasons may be understood in an intelligible way is to understand how they are created: by object-given facts. Since, "Reasons are given by facts", in order to understand the way in which reasons are given by or through facts, the various types of reasons that we may have (decisive, strongly decisive, actual, and apparent) must be delineated, as well as, how, based upon the relevant facts we may distinguish between these in a meaningful way.

All normative reasons arise from the relevant reason-giving facts which are present in any given situation (34). Therefore in order to explicate how facts may be reason-giving it must first be shown how facts operate in Parfit's view of morality, and second, how an agent may interact with facts in such a way that facts alone may provide normativity.

Facts, for Parfit, are simply those objective realities that are impartially true and as such have the ability to determine reasons. For example, if we return to the agent confronted by a poisonous snake, there are simple facts that the snake will bite the agent if he runs, and there is a fact that remaining still will result in the snake staying docile. These facts are true irrespective of any belief, whether true or false, that the agent may have, and as such generate reasons for action that are grounded solely in these realities.

Although facts alone provide reasons, within any situation there are many types of facts, some of which have no bearing upon what we ought to do, and so we must distinguish facts in a useful way when discussing normativity. Some facts although true and accessible to an agent have no relation to what we ought to do: for example, the agent in front of the snake can be wearing shorts, or a dress, neither of which affect what he ought to do when confronted by the snake. Therefore, we must restrict the scope of inquiry to only what Parfit calls the "relevant, reason-giving facts." (34) All of the facts which provide normative reasons in any given situation are known as the relevant reason-giving facts. These facts have a distinct ability to generate reasons not only due to their true nature, but also to their applicability in affecting what we ought to do in a normative sense.

Once extraneous facts are excluded, an agent who examines only the relevant facts would properly understand that standing still is the only possible action which will result in

their life being spared. There are the relevant facts that the agent desires to live,<sup>7</sup> that if bitten the agent will die, and that the snake will only bite if the agent runs. These facts, when combined, provide the cohesive fact that only staying still will ensure the snake not biting, which thus results in a reason to stay still. These facts are reason-giving, since irrespective of any beliefs, the agent may appeal to these facts and thus correctly infer that what he or she ought to do is stay still.

The relevant facts from the snake example conform together to provide a normative answer to the agent confronted with the poisonous snake. These facts work in conjunction with each other to provide the agent with an understanding of what they ought to do. Yet, not all facts in a given scenario often lend themselves to a cohesive conclusion. It is possible, for example, for facts to conflict, such as, "If I enjoy walnuts, this fact gives me a reason to eat them; but if they would kill me, this fact gives me a stronger or weightier conflicting reason not to eat them." (32) When facts conflict, there must be various criterion which can be used to judge them, such that we can determine what we have most reason to do. Reasons thus should be seen as often falling into categories of degrees when one has conflicting reasons for action; these categories are of "force, strength, or weight." (32)

Since reasons can be differentiated by degree, when we have conflicting reasons, "If our reasons to act in some way are stronger than our reasons to act in any of the other possible ways, these reasons are decisive, and acting in this way is what we have most reason to do." (32) If these reasons are stronger than all others, then they are called "strongly decisive"

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<sup>7</sup> Parfit claims that we can establish all reasons, even those pertaining to desires, "as being provided by certain facts, such as facts about our desires, or about the wrongness of some act," (45).

reasons, and “when we have decisive reasons, or most reason, to act in some way, this act is what we should or ought to do in what we can call the *decisive-reason-implying senses*.” (33)

Reasons that are decisive provide what we have most reason to do: this distinction, however, implies that we may also have reasons to act upon facts in a way other than what is decisive. These auxiliary reasons, though, are subjugated to those which are strongly decisive, and in this way in any situation we usually have exactly one decisive course of action. There may be cases in which we have two or more possible reasons that are equally acceptable for an agent to choose; in these cases a decisive reason does not exist, but rather the agent has “*sufficient* reasons, or *enough* reason, to act in any of two or more ways.” (32) This lack of decisiveness within some scenarios, as well as the fact that, “though there are truths about the relative strength of different reasons, these truths are often very imprecise,” (33) produces an allusiveness in determining what we have decisive reason to do.

Since we are often unable to determine what we have decisive reason to do, when we are “asking what we ought to do in the decisive-reason-implying sense... [we should also be concerned with]...what we ought rationally to do.” (33) As actual, imperfect agents, which are not always or perhaps even often perceptive of all of the reason-giving facts, we are capable of rationally acting in procedural ways that are not supported by facts. Parfit must then present us with an account of rational action when an agent is unaware of some or all of the relevant facts. In order for a normativity based upon facts to be seen as practically applicable, it must contain provisions for right action when some or all of the facts are obscured, or misunderstood by actual agents, and thus Parfit must appeal to more than just fully informed ideal reasons in

determining what we ought to do; otherwise Parfit's account of normativity will not be a significant improvement over DT.

Parfit appeals to belief in providing a view of rational action which does not depend solely upon facts but which is still able to apply to actual agents, not just ideal agents. Belief allows for rational action since it does not depend upon facticity, but rather only necessitates an appeal to procedural rationality. As has already been shown, procedurally rational action does not focus upon one's aims, but rather their means, and thus maintains the label of rational as long as there is consistency in one's actions. Since belief does not depend upon factitious justification, as long an action stemming from any belief is procedurally accurate then this action is rational. However, even though belief is most often rational, it may nonetheless lack substantive foundations. Therefore, the reasons generated through belief must be separated into two categories, apparent and real reasons. These two categories both allow for rational belief, yet only the latter is guaranteed to contain substantive qualities.

Apparent reasons are those which are based upon beliefs "whose truth would give us a reason to act in some way." (35) Apparent reasons are generated by beliefs, which implies that they do not necessarily correlate to facts. Since apparent reasons are based on beliefs, they are generated equally from true or false beliefs. However, when the beliefs, upon which an apparent reason are grounded are false, it results in what may be called a "merely-apparent reason" (35) which, although possibly procedurally rational, does not provide reasons with normative force since it necessarily lacks facticity. If, however, the beliefs which an apparent reason depend upon are true, then "this apparent reason is also a real reason." (35)

Belief is able to rationally supply us with *merely apparent*, and *real* reasons alike due to our un-ideal state as actual beings. Since we seldom know all of the relevant facts, belief plays a major role in what it would be rational for us to do. Only facts generate real reasons, due to their true nature, but we may still be acting rationally when we act upon merely apparent reasons, since we are often limited due to our lack of access to facts. Therefore, although possibly lacking normative force, all rational beliefs provide us with a form of reasons.

Yet, even though all real reasons are also necessarily apparent reasons, they differ significantly since apparent reasons do not necessitate real reasons. Only apparent reasons whose beliefs are true provide real, or decisive reasons, because they correlate to relevant reason-implying facts. Apparent reasons, conversely whose beliefs may correlate falsely to facts, may only be seen as *merely apparent*, and thus do not generate actual reasons. Real reasons are thus the only reasons which generate normativity, since they alone necessarily adhere to facts, which, according to Parfit, is the sole criterion for normativity. Because real reasons are those which adhere to facts and correspondingly generate normativity, real reasons are also the only reasons which may be decisive, in the *decisive reason-implying sense*.

Although decisive reasons are only generated through apparent reasons that are also real reasons, Parfit claims that both types of reasons, even though not decisive, may at the very least be understood as providing rational reasons. Parfit says that, “what it would be rational for people to do depends upon their apparent reasons, whether or not these reasons are real, or merely apparent.” (35) Rationality depends solely upon an agent’s ability to avoid “certain kinds of inconsistency and other mismatches between [their] intentions, beliefs, and other mental states.”(36) Although an agent may act rationally as long as he maintains procedural



rationality, Parfit is clear that they do not successfully generate real, and more importantly, decisive reasons without true beliefs. It is for this reason alone, that, according to Parfit, subjectivists cannot supply us with a normative framework for action. Subjectivists situate their view of normativity exclusively within procedural accounts, and because of this, true beliefs, or as we shall see substantive beliefs, are not open to them.

All apparent reasons have the potential to be not only rational, but also decisive reasons. Merely apparent reasons, however, fail to motivate actual reasons, not because they are irrational, but rather due to their lack of adherence to relevant-facts. Therefore, although all apparent reasons have the potential to be rational, because merely apparent reasons lack facticity, they are unable to provide normativity. By appealing to substantive rationality Parfit presents an object-given solution to this lack of facticity found in merely apparent reasons which succeeds in generating real apparent reasons. Real reasons depend upon beliefs which are true, and since procedural rationality cannot determine the facticity of beliefs, only the means to achieving whatever aims an agent may have, the combination of procedural and substantively rational operations must be performed in conjunction in order to establish normativity. Parfit claims that when an agent is procedurally rational and bases his beliefs upon substantively rational facts then he generate normatively powerful reasons. Real reasons are thus generated through consistent adherence to true beliefs which are true solely because of their connection to the relevant reason implying facts.

For Parfit, reasons are intrinsically linked with facts, and this adherence to facts provides objective grounding for right action. Parfit claims that we ought “to reject all subjective theories, and accept some objective theory. [Since] our practical reasons are all object-given

and value-based.” (65)<sup>8</sup> Object-given, or practical moral foundations, are claimed to be superior to Subjective accounts, since practical reasons generate real reasons that are telic. Subjectivists instead claim that “our reasons for acting are all provided by, or depend upon, certain facts about what would fulfill or achieve our present desires or aims.” (45) Since situating morality within a structure of facts lends a basic consistency, which desire lacks, objective foundations are able to provide normative reasons, where desire can only ever offer motivating reasons for action.

Although Parfit presents a minimal account of the role of motivating reasons within morality, desires are nonetheless incorporated into normativity in a crucial way. Often what we are motivated to do through desire is not normative; (37) however, it is also true that “we have many reasons for acting that we wouldn’t have if we didn’t have certain desires.”(67) This apparent discrepancy is reconciled through the claim that, desires, in some circumstances, are facts which may be used in a normative way. Parfit claims that “when the fulfillment of some desire would give us pleasure, this fact gives us a value-based hedonic reason to do what would fulfill this desire,” (68) but since he also says that subjective theories are “mistaken,” and there are no “desire-based, aim-based, or choice-based” reasons, he must provide an account of how desires are to be seen as distinctly separate from hedonic reasons. (65)

As was seen in Chapter 1, Subjectivists claim to confer value onto a thing, or into an action primarily due to our present conscious desire, or wanting an object or action. Parfit contends that ascribing value to objects or actions in this way is to misunderstand the

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note here that Parfit had claimed earlier that practical reasons are provided by “certain facts that give us reasons both to have certain desires and aims, and to do whatever might achieve these aims. These reasons are given by facts about the *objects* of these desires or aims, or what we might want or try to achieve. We can therefore call such reasons *object-given*,” (45). Therefore we should see Parfit as using “practical”, synonymously with object-given.

relationships of sensations, hedonic likings or dislikings, and our conscious mental states of these likings and dislikings. Following Parfit, I will refer to these three distinctions, respectively, as *sensations*, *hedonic likings or dislikings*, and *meta-hedonic desires*. In order to understand why Parfit claims that Subjectivism, which bases its value within the hedonic desires, fails to generate values, it will be necessary to understand exactly how these three respective concepts are distinctly unique, yet often work in unison.

Sensations, which are the most basic of the three, are simply those temporally present physical stimuli which agents experience through their empirical faculties. Sensations lack value in terms of good and bad, but rather are the purely descriptive realities of sensory perception. They are normatively neutral, and any singular sensation can be the object of a meta-hedonic desire. Sensations do not contain any intrinsic value, and although sensations might, for example, “be claimed to be in themselves bad when their quality is affected in certain ways by our disliking them,” (54) this does not give value to the sensation, but rather, value resides in our conscious state of disliking a sensation. As will be shown, all value which typically has been ascribed to sensations, whether positively or negatively, has been situated incorrectly within our relationship to stimuli. Instead of placing value upon our sensations, value correctly situated should be seen as attached to our different mental states.

*Hedonic likings or dislikings*, which are often confused with pure sensations, are instead, the agent’s specific liking or disliking of a given sensation as it is presented to him. Hedonic reasons are provided simply by the affinity towards or against sensations as they are perceived. For example, when an agent experiences the sensation of his hand being burned there is a sensation of burning flesh which is then received and often turned into a disliking for that

sensation. It is entirely possible, however, that an individual may enjoy the sensation of burned flesh, which is usually associated with pain, and in that case there would be a liking of this sensation.

It is also true of hedonic likings and dislikings, like sensations, that they “cannot be aimed at the future, or at what is merely possible.” (54) Since our hedonic likings or dislikings must be responses to sensations, in the absence of a present sensation, we cannot experience a hedonic desire. Therefore, although hedonic likings are conscious mental states, since they lack the ability to be future oriented, and desire simply is a wanting of a state that we are not in, hedonic likings, and dislikings are not desires.

The key distinction that Parfit makes in the structure of desire is what he calls *meta-hedonic desires*. Parfit believes that these meta-hedonic desires are most often overlooked or undifferentiated. “Many people fail to distinguish between hedonic likings or dislikings and such meta-hedonic desires...[and] these mental states differ in several ways.” (54) Unlike the hedonic likings or dislikings of some sensation, our meta-hedonic desires are our conscious awareness of these likings or dislikings. For example when I burn my hand on a flame, I have a sensation of being burnt, as well as either a hedonic liking or disliking of this sensation. It is also the case that I am aware of this hedonic orientation, and that I am conscious of either the fact that I like or dislike this sensation. It is within the understanding of meta-hedonic desires that we can begin to ascribe value to sensations. “Though these sensations are not in themselves good or bad, they are part of complex mental states that *are* good or bad. When we are in pain, what is bad is not our sensation but our conscious state of having a sensation that we dislike.” (54) When ascribing value it is important to understand that the meta-hedonic desires “do not

make their objects good or bad,” (54) but rather since it is good to be in states which we like, positive meta hedonic desires count as a sort of fact which allows them to be used in a normative sense.

Meta-hedonic desires may, for example, provide a reason to remove a sensation which we dislike. As Parfit claims, “when we are in pain, what is bad is not our sensation but our conscious state of having a sensation that we dislike.” (54) Meta-hedonic desires differ from hedonic likings in that they are fulfilled by having sensations which we like, whereas hedonic likings cannot be fulfilled or unfulfilled. Our hedonic likings are simply our affinity towards or against a sensation as it is presented to us. Meta-hedonic desires, rather, are the conscious awareness of having a hedonic liking or disliking of a sensation and can be “fulfilled either by our ceasing to have this sensation, or by our continuing to have it but ceasing to dislike it.” (54)

Meta-hedonic likings and dislikings are the complex mental states which Parfit claims can be viewed as good or bad. Because it is good for us to not be in states of pain or to have mental or physical states that we dislike, Parfit claims that object-given theories can appeal to meta-hedonic desires in such a way that these desires provide normative reasons. According to Parfit, when we are experiencing a state which we dislike we have object-given reasons to avoid this state. The critical step which Parfit claims that Subjectivists get wrong though is that they confer value onto a state because of our desire. However, this misunderstands the relationship of desire and normativity. As Parfit claims, “though it is good to have sensations that we *like*, nothing is good merely because we *want* this thing.” (55) If sensations were ‘good’ in such a way, then hedonic desires would generate reasons, and we would not need to appeal to meta-hedonic desires. Yet, Parfit insists that what makes meta-hedonic desires good or bad is that

they appeal to facts about our desires which give us reasons to pursue states that we like and avoid those we do not. These reasons are not dependent upon our liking of these states, but any agent who is substantively rational would also like any state that they have object-given reasons to do.

Therefore the three concepts previously labeled work in tandem to create value in a very different way than Subjective desire. Subjectivists claim to have sensations which they like or dislike, and then attempt to ascribe value to a particular action which correlates with this liking or disliking. Yet, they omit the crucial step of appealing to meta-hedonic desires, and it is because of this omission that they fail to generate value. Since meta-hedonic desires are dependent upon reasons and not just upon our independent desires, they are able to provide value where hedonic likings or dislikings do not. This value stems from the fact that unlike sensations and hedonic likings we can change our meta-hedonic desires in two distinct ways. Since “what we want is not to be having a sensation that we dislike”, and, what we are disliking is our conscious awareness of having a sensation which we do not want, “Our desire [to not have a sensation which we dislike] could be fulfilled either by our ceasing to have this sensation, or by our continuing to have it but ceasing to dislike it.” (54) Thus for the Objectivist our meta-hedonic desires may be informed by reasons and are open to change once we apply these reasons to our mental states. This allows for a dependence upon reasons in a way that the subjectivist, which cannot appeal to meta-hedonic states, is not allowed.

Parfit believes that Subjectivists focus their moral claims within the context of hedonic likings and dislikings, and it is for this reason that they end up being groundless. Hedonic likings and dislikings cannot in themselves provide any more value than sensations, since they are

merely our affinities towards sensations as we experience them. Hedonic likings and dislikings are merely the fact that we like or dislike particular sensations, and therefore they are simply our present desires for certain stimuli. Meta-hedonic desires, however, go beyond just a liking or disliking: these meta-hedonic desires are conscious mental states that can respond to certain facts, such as the fact that it is a substantive good to be within a state of pleasure, or a substantive evil to be within a state of pain. Through a response to facts an agent who is experiencing sensations, such as a hedonic disliking, can change his relation to this sensation in such a way that it would cease to be something which they dislike. Although meta-hedonic desires are incapable of imbuing value into a sensation itself, an agent may respond to sensations by using these desires in such a way that they would provide reason for action. For example,

When we are experiencing intense pleasure, by having some sensation that we intensely like, we have no reason to be liking this sensation. If we did not like this sensation, we would not be being irrational, or making any mistake. But we have strong reasons to want to be having, and to go on having, sensations that we intensely like. (56)

Meta-hedonic desires are able to generate reasons since they depend upon the satisfaction of substantive principles. They do not make sensations good or bad, and as such this limits subjectivists from using them to claim that desires may provide value, but because these desires appeal to facts about our well-being, they are capable of providing reasons.

Parfit provides an account of reasons which is dependent upon facts, but, in a useful way, incorporates desires into normativity. Although desires, which are always subject-based, cannot provide normative reasons by themselves, desires can be used as normative facts when deciding what we have most reason to do. Therefore what we have most or decisive reason to

do can often be dependent upon certain desires which we have. No desire in itself can be substantive, but because we should all want to be being in states that we enjoy, and the fulfillment of desire is the way in which this is possible, it is often necessary to fulfill our meta-hedonic desires.



## CHAPTER 3: NOTIONS OF SUBJECTIVE DELIBERATION

### Section 1: The Individual Good, and Contract Theory

Without preamble or specific justification Parfit claims that John Rawls belongs within the category of Subjectivists. There are two plausible explanations of this, one at the individual level, and one at the macro or societal level. The former provides the framework for the latter and gives substance to Rawls' Theory of Justice. Therefore it will be important to provide first the individual or micro account of Rawls' subjectivism, and then further the macro or societal account. Once this has been done, we should have an accurate understanding of Parfit's labeling Rawls' as a subjectivist.

The micro account of normativity which Rawls presents is one in which he defines reasons in terms of the good, and this is translated simply as "the successful execution of a rational plan of life." (R380) For example, Rawls asks us to "imagine someone whose only pleasure is to count blades of grass in various geometrically shaped areas such as park squares and well-trimmed lawns...The definition of the good forces us to admit that the good for this man is indeed counting blades of grass." (R379) Rawls claims that what is good for this man is counting blades of grass and although this man is an exception to Rawls' conception of rationality, Rawls, nevertheless admits that the good for this man lies within his desire to count blades of grass. The view of the good which Rawls' uses depends upon what he calls the *Aristotelian Principle*, which states that "other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities, and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater the complexity." (R374)

Rawls combines the *Aristotelian Principle* with the conception of a rational plan, and together these generate judgments of value. Since, as Rawls claims, “the things that are commonly thought of as human goods should turn out to be the ends and activities that have a major place in rational plans,” (R378) when we enjoin the two claims that realized capacities bring us happiness, and the procedural means to do this is through a rational plan, it is possible to see that, for Rawls, on the micro level, procedural rules that result in happiness are equivalent to the good, and thus generate reasons.

By translating procedural rationality into terms of a rational plan, we can see that, when combined with the *Aristotelian Principle*, on an individual level, Rawls provides a subjective account of normativity. By espousing a conception of the good which is predicated upon the fulfillment of our desires (realization of our capacities) along with adhering to a rational plan to realize these desires, Rawls’ can be seen as following a similar account of DT which Parfit presents.

Aside from the individual subjectivist account which Rawls provides, we must also consider his macro account of political justice. An inclusion of Rawls’ contract theory is vital due to the simple fact that Rawls’ writings on justice and political theory provide a necessary deliberative foundation which is not found in his micro level conception of normativity.

For Rawls, the principles of justice are decided upon by the contractors of the polity from behind the veil of ignorance, and are subjective principles of justice which are accepted due to the probability that the individual contractor would be placing herself in the best scenario comparatively to others which they may choose.

Rawls claims that when pursuing principles of justice, when behind the veil, the aim is to “use the idea of pure procedural justice from the beginning” (R104) in determining what is right. By using principles that are procedurally just<sup>9</sup> we would agree to a conception of justice that is “stable” since it is optimally just to all irrespective of the corresponding facts associated with the state in which they actually find themselves. A form of justice which follows this framework is stable since it produces an equilibrium which is “the best situation that [any] can reach by free exchange,” and since “no one has any incentive to alter it, it will persist in the absence of further changes in the circumstances.” (R103)

Rawls’ insistence upon the use of pure procedural principles appears to be the basis for Parfit’s claim that Rawls is a subjectivist about reasons. The two principles, Equal Liberty,<sup>10</sup> and the Difference Principle<sup>11</sup> upon which Rawls founds his theory of justice are derived solely from rational deliberation. “What these individuals will do is then derived by strictly deductive reasoning from these assumptions about their beliefs and interests, their situation and the options open to them. Their conduct is, in the phrase of Pareto, the resultant of tastes and obstacles.” (103) For Rawls, the principles of justice are drawn solely out of a procedurally rational approach to morality which are chosen due to their ability to promote the individuals

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<sup>9</sup> I.e. principles that do not favor individuals based upon preexisting economic, social, political, mental, etc. states. But, rather, temporarily blinds the individual to these facts that are “arbitrary from the moral point of view” (R104) which allows a form of justice that is agreed on based on the subjective desire of an individual to be as maximally happy as they may hope to be, and yet limits their knowledge of their current state so that they may not favor their own preferences over others.

<sup>10</sup> “Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all,” (R220).

<sup>11</sup> “Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of his equality of opportunity,” (R266).

own wellbeing above all else. "They are the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality." (10)

The principles of justice are seen as subjective in nature due to their application only in satisfying the individual's own interests. An individual in the original position, who is behind the veil of ignorance, would rationally choose only those principles that favor themselves, and in so doing would opt for Rawls' two principles. If Parfit is to claim that Rawls' theory is subjective, it must be due to the appeal of the "tastes and obstacles" of the original position contractors. Parfit must contend that an adherence to one's own interests is that which makes Rawls' system subjective, or else it becomes very unclear as to how Rawls' principles of justice would fit the title 'subjective', since Rawls is himself clearly concerned with substantive appeals.

As Rawls writes, "I wish, then, to stress the central place of the study of our substantive moral conceptions."<sup>12</sup> (R45) The principles which Rawls presents are, in Rawls opinion, as close to substantive as imperfect actual agents may hope to arrive at, and as such should be "regarded as provisionally justified." (R46) Yet, as has already been seen, Parfit rejects that Subjectivists can appeal to substantive claims, and so Parfit must reject Rawls use of these principles for one of two reasons: either they must be seen as non-substantive, or these principles are not logically open to Subjectivists since they "deny that we have such object-given reasons." (62)

Rawls claims that viewing his two principles as substantive is justified since they do "all that one may reasonably ask" from a theory of justice (R36). Whether these principles are truly

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<sup>12</sup> Although Rawls does not use 'substantive' in the way in which Parfit uses substantive when discussing rationality, I believe that there is a strong correlation between the two nevertheless. Since, when Parfit uses 'substantive' he is referring to 'what we choose', and as will be seen shortly, through Rawls' use of reflective equilibrium, Rawls' theory of justice also focuses upon what we choose, I believe that in a broad sense Rawls and Parfit are addressing the same conception of 'substantive'.

substantively the best principles may be debated, but it is of little doubt that these principles satisfy Parfit's notion of substantive rationality, since they clearly are primarily aimed at *what* we choose. Although Rawls depends upon a procedurally rational operation in determining his two principles, this alone does not render him a Subjectivist, since even Parfit's ideal Objectivist agent must be procedurally rational. Rawls' two principles are substantive in nature, and as such, Parfit cannot conclude that Rawls is a Subjectivist from examining these principles alone. Instead, if Parfit is to label Rawls as a Subjectivist it must be due to Rawls' method in determining his substantive principles.

Parfit's contention of Rawls' Subjectivism seems most plausibly directed at Rawls' appeal to the "tastes and obstacles" of agents, as well as his assertion that his theory of justice is, from the beginning, a purely procedural one. Even though Rawls claims to arrive at substantive principles, since his foundations are purely procedural, they must be seen as subjectively derived, and thus, if Parfit is correct, ultimately inaccessible to Rawls. The principles of Justice satisfy Parfit's account of substantively rational principles, but because they are derived solely out of a procedural framework, which must be subjective, since it aims at "*how* we make our choices," these principles are not open to Deliberative Subjectivists, because they depend upon object-given reasons. Rawls' ideal agent behind the veil of ignorance chooses these principles not because they are what is substantively rational, but rather because they are those that "after such [ideal] deliberation, we would choose." (63) Thus it appears that to correctly understand Parfit's assertion, that Rawls is a subjectivist, we must understand Rawls' subjectivism as being founded in his procedural framework of justice.

Another key component of Rawls' theory of justice is the use of reflective equilibrium when determining principles. Reflective equilibrium compares the principles which we derive from behind the veil of ignorance with our pre-analytic moral intuitions, and determines their applicability as moral concepts based on this comparison. The use of reflective equilibrium is needed as an evaluative tool, because it just simply is the "fact that our present theories are primitive and have grave defects." (R45)

Reflective Equilibrium provides a means of examining the principles which we arrive at through deliberative processes. Since Rawls relies upon a purely procedural and deliberative route in determining what we have reason to do, and as non-ideal agents we often err in our deliberations, reflective equilibrium provides a principle for reexamining and adjusting our deliberations to account for apparent shortcomings in the principles we derive from deliberation. Therefore we must use reflective equilibrium upon completion of our deliberations in order to ensure that there are not overt mismatches between our pre-analytic intuitions, and our judgments about what reasons we have which are formed through processes of deliberation. This process still maintains solely subjective appeals, since reflective equilibrium depends upon only our moral intuitions, and this, as Parfit claims, falls to provide substantive justification.

## **Section 2: Internal Reasons and Deliberative Priority**

Bernard Williams provides a deliberative foundation of reasons which in many ways parallels that of the Deliberative Subjectivist viewpoint provided by Parfit. Williams places deliberation, or rather correct deliberation, above all other concerns within the framework of

normativity, and couples this with internal reasons, or desires, to generate reasons for action. Agents have many internal reasons, along with concerns of practical necessity which may influence their deliberations, and so we must have some way to assign what Williams calls, *deliberative priority*.<sup>13</sup> What follows then is a presentation of Williams' model of normativity, which blends internal reasons or desires, along with deliberation in order to generate reasons.

Williams' account of reasons is an internalist one which he presents in his paper, "Internal and External Reasons."<sup>14</sup> The internalist structure that Williams provides is presented in a four point argument which he gives in contrast to the externalist theory of desire. Williams' argument which hinges on the use of an agent's subjective motivational set (S), and all potential desires, which are members of S (D), claims that

(i) an internal reason statement is falsified by the absence of some appropriate element from S.

(ii) A member of S, D, will not give A a reason for  $\phi$ -ing if either the existence of D is dependent on false belief, or A's belief in the relevance of  $\phi$ -ing to the satisfaction of D is false.

(iii) (a) A may falsely believe an internal reason statement about himself, and (we can add)

(b) A may not know some true internal reason statement about himself.

(iv) internal reason statements can be discovered in deliberative reasoning.<sup>15</sup>

These premises given by Williams are meant to provide an alternative viewpoint to the simplified internalist account which is often ascribed to Hume, namely that "any element in S

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<sup>13</sup> Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 185.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," 101-113.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," 102-104.

gives rise to internal reasons.”<sup>16</sup> (i) implies, however, that an agent, *A*, ceases to have an internal reason if elements in *S* are based upon false beliefs. For example, if *A* has a glass of liquid which he believes to be gin and desires to drink it, but in fact the liquid is actually petrol, according to the Humean model, *S* still has a reason to drink the liquid due to his desire *D*. (i) contends that *S* in fact does not have a reason, and Williams claims that this is a justifiable conclusion since it is false that we should only be concerned with explanation of *A*’s, *D*. Rather when determining what we have reason to do we must take into account whether *A*’s deliberation and actions were rational.

(i) claims that the absence of some element in *S* falsifies reasons which result when these elements are absent. Yet because (i) doesn’t mention what these elements are, it must be subsumed under (ii) in order to be of use. Therefore we must turn to (ii) to provide the elements which have the ability to falsify internally generated reasons

(ii) establishes that all *D*’s that are dependent upon false beliefs, or which provide a procedural reasons to  $\phi$  that are not supported by true beliefs, are elements which render internally generated reasons false. In other words, without true beliefs, which should properly be understood as the missing elements in (i), *A* does not have a substantive reason to  $\phi$ . The externalist at this point typically admits that since *A* does not have a substantive reason to  $\phi$ , then they in fact have no reason whatsoever to  $\phi$ . This however, according to Williams is false.

Although *A* does not have a substantive reason to  $\phi$  in the gin example, *A* would nevertheless have a procedural reason to  $\phi$ , which equates to saying that *A* acted rationally, even though *A*  $\phi$ -ed based on a false or ignorant belief. It is false to claim that *A* had no reason

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<sup>16</sup> Williams, “Internal and External Reasons,” 102.



for  $\phi$ -ing when acting upon  $D$  which is supplied or influenced by a false belief.  $A$  in fact had reason to  $\phi$ , but as will be seen this reason is outweighed and assessed less priority than  $A$ 's  $D$  which is based upon true beliefs and correct deliberation.

Because  $A$  may have reasons which are not substantive, by separating what is rational into procedural and substantive appeals Williams is able to engage the use of (iii) and (iv). (iii) separates the types of falsifications that can be impressed upon  $D$  into those which (a) result from a false belief, and (b) those which result from ignorance. (a) and (b) are, according to Williams, the two ways in which a false belief may be acquired and used in a procedurally rational way by  $A$ , and although they are both subsumed under (iv) and thus rendered insufficient in providing substantive reasons, they nevertheless, much like Parfit's account, may still result in rational action.

(iii) precludes appeals to substantive reasons and so Williams must invoke (iv), which claims that, internal reason statements can be discovered in deliberative reasoning. All members of  $S$  that are in the form of  $D$  are capable of generating rationally provided reasons for  $\phi$ -ing, but, according to Williams, this does not necessarily supply a substantive reason to  $\phi$ . As Williams says,

$A$  has reason to  $\phi$ ' does not mean 'the action which  $A$  has overall, all-in, reason to do is  $\phi$ -ing. He can have reason to do a lot of things which he has other and stronger reasons not to do.<sup>17</sup>

$A$  may have reasons to  $\phi$ , but the reasons provided by  $D$  may be overridden by other stronger internal reason which arise out of the process of deliberation. Because  $D$  may be

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<sup>17</sup> Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," 104.

overridden by internal reasons which are found through deliberation, (iv) is the proper place in which we encounter Williams' concept of deliberative priority.

Deliberative priority is that principle which provides us with substantive reasons, and is situated solely within the act of deliberation. Yet unlike externalist accounts, such as Parfit's, the deliberative process is one that necessarily must not only contain normativity, but also, by definition, motivate. As Korsgaard writes, in Williams' model "anything reached by a process of deliberation from the subjective motivational set [S] may be something for which there is an internal reason, one that can motivate."<sup>18</sup> Thus, according to Williams, we should realize that "on any adequate showing, ethical motivations are going to be important, and this has consequences for how we should deliberate."<sup>19</sup> Since William's account of reasons is one which links rational deliberation inextricably with internal desires, it is necessary to understand what part each of these elements play within normativity, and how priority may be established.

Motivational concerns notwithstanding, Williams' model of deliberation is one which in many ways parallels that of Parfit's, and as such I will use Parfit's account of reasons as a template to explain Williams' notion of deliberative priority. As was seen in Parfit's account reasons can be separated into apparent and real reasons, and although all real reasons are also apparent, apparent reasons are not necessarily real. All real reasons are decisive and based upon facts, such that any ideal agent, whom would necessarily deliberate correctly, would choose those real reasons which are open to them.

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<sup>18</sup> Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 326. Henceforth, in this thesis numbers in parenthesis with the prefix K refer to this book.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 185.

Parfit's model of reasons is an external object-given one. All appeals to what an agent has reason to do are provided by facts, and thus there is no possibility of a petition to members of *S* within this view. A critical move that Parfit makes, however, is to allow *A* the ability to rationally choose a non-real, apparent reason, even though it lacks substantive justification. This allows Parfit to maintain external reasons, and yet not undermine what seems like a plausible account of rationality.

When Parfit's model of rationality is imposed upon Williams' we see that, although Williams depends upon internal reasons and not object-given facts, Williams has a similar conception of rational deliberation. Williams, unlike Parfit, is unwilling to abandon motivational concerns within normativity, and so internal reasons are necessary, but, by using deliberation, Williams nevertheless claims that we can assign priority to reasons in a similar fashion. All members of *S*, *D*, have the ability to generate the equivalent of what Parfit calls apparent reasons, and although possibly rational, the reasons generated through *D* may not be substantive. What we may have "overall" reason, or for Parfit, decisive reason to do, may be different than what *D* would imply. Therefore, we must assign priority to some concerns such as our ethical motivations, obligations (such as those of immediacy, or emergency), issues of practical necessity, and others.<sup>20</sup>

Deliberative priority functions similarly to the deliberative process which Parfit uses in determining what we have decisive reason to do. The key difference is that Parfit believes that because we can appeal to object-given facts, we have objectively substantive reasons which are generated. Whereas for Williams there are no objectively substantive reasons, instead, Williams

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<sup>20</sup> Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 185-190.

believes that “there is an essential indeterminacy in what can be counted a rational deliberative process,”<sup>21</sup> yet this merely shows that “there is a wider range of states, and a less determinate one, than one might have supposed, which can be counted as *A*’s having a reason to  $\phi$ .”<sup>22</sup>

The model of deliberation which Williams provides is capable of presenting a union of normativity with motivational reasons which many objective theories lack; however, it is also susceptible to certain critiques, like that of Parfit’s, since it relies fundamentally upon desires. Since all reasons must motivate, and this in turn implies that, for Williams, all reasons are internal, according to Parfit, there is a basic lack of substantive force behind Williams’ model.

The way in which Williams attempts to avoid apparent substantive shortcomings in his model of deliberation is by adhering to certain fundamental desires which rational agents must possess and use when deliberating. Williams’ does not systematically attempt to present all internal reasons which rational agents must inherently desire, but he does provide several rational desires which agents must possess if deliberation is to be useful in generating internal reasons. As Williams says,

Included in the *S* of every rational agent is a desire not to fail through error ... it may be claimed that prudential, or again moral, policies are similarly involved in what it is to be a fully rational agent ... It may, indeed, to some extent be true, particularly with regard to a modest amount of prudence; if an agent is totally devoid of concern for the effects of his actions on himself, we may indeed have problems in understanding what could count for him as a sound deliberative route at all. But to the extent that these things are true, then we are being told something about the necessary contents of the *S* of any rational agent.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Williams, “Internal and External Reasons,” 110.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, “Internal and External Reasons,” 110.

<sup>23</sup> Williams, *Philosophy as Humanistic Discipline*, 111.

Desires, such as prudence, are not just necessary deliberative tools, Williams claims that they are necessary members of *S* for all rational agents. By including necessary members of *S*, of which I will argue later there are others, Williams is able to appeal to substantive claims about deliberation. If Williams is correct, and there are members of *S* which all rational agents have, then these desires contain sufficient substantive force to generate normative reasons. Although Parfit will raise concerns about the normativity of these desires, I will defend their ability to provide sufficient foundations for substantive subjectivist appeals.

### Section 3: The Categorical Unity of Desires

Although Michael Smith agrees with Williams' account of reasons in many ways, he rejects the notion that normativity follows a strictly internal account of reasons. The Internalist standard of reasons which Williams provides is partly true, according to Smith, but it also lacks critical components which, in turn, render it an incomplete, or inadequate version of Normativity.

Williams' account of reasons which Smith responds to is presented as,

Someone has a reason to  $\phi$  in circumstances *C* if and only if she would desire that she  $\phi$ s in circumstances *C* if she were fully rational, where in order to be fully rational an agent must satisfy the following three conditions: (i) the agent must have no false beliefs. (ii) the agent must have all relevant true beliefs. (iii) the agent must deliberate correctly.<sup>24</sup>

Smith claims that, "Williams' conditions (i) through (iii) seem to [Smith] to constitute a fairly accurate spelling out of our idea of practical rationality." (S158) Yet Smith argues that

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Smith. *The Moral Problem*, 156. Henceforth, in this thesis numbers in parenthesis with the prefix S refer to this book.

there is something lacking in Williams' account of (iii), and without "supplementation" Williams' readers are left with an inadequate account of correct deliberation. Without further constraints, (i) through (iii) cannot preclude the critical objections of "compulsions, addictions, emotional disturbances, and the like." (S158) Moreover, Williams depends primarily upon the use of the imagination in creating new, or destroying old desires, and although "Williams is right, [Smith thinks] that deliberation can both produce new and destroy old underived desires. [Williams] is wrong that the only, or even the most important, way in which this happens is via the exercise of the imagination." (S158)

Furthermore, Smith claims that if Williams is correct when stating that "reason sanctions the operation of the imagination," it is only due to the significant qualification that "desires are *systematically justifiable*." (S159) To elaborate upon this point, and to provide his qualification, Smith appeals to Rawls' conception of reflective equilibrium to show precisely how reason can sanction the use of imagination.

When we are deliberating about what we have reason to do, and also about what desires we ought to have, we deliberate by "trying to find out whether our desires are systematically justifiable." (S159) Those desires which are "non-derivatively desirable" are systematically justifiable, since they are a basis for all derivative desires which we may have. When we are deciding upon which desires which it may be rational to have, we must use a reflective method which establishes a unity of those desires which as a set may be called normative.

The desires which may be united as a particular virtue should be those non-derivative desires which underlie all resulting desires that may come about as procedural necessities. The

process which is undergone in an attempt to discern the virtues is one of reflective equilibrium, since this principle attempts to uncover the basic desires which non-derivatively ground the virtues. Those desires which are to be labeled as virtues must be applicable across many situations and among all or most subjects, and as such, they must not only be non-derivative, but also widely applicable. It is for this reason that Smith uses Rawls' principle of reflective equilibrium, since this principle makes reductions until it arrives at non-derivative desires, which "match our considered convictions." (R18) Therefore as Rawls claims, "It is an equilibrium because at last our principles and judgments coincide; and it is reflective since we know to what principles our judgments conform and the premises of their derivation." (R18)

Smith incorporates imagination, as Williams sees it functioning, into the conception of reflective equilibrium by claiming that we can imagine those desires which non-derivatively ground virtuous desire. Thus by using the reflective component in our deliberative process, we can imagine those desires which match our considered convictions, or basic moral intuitions, and thus arrive at virtuous desires in this manner. However, although we can use imagination in this way, Smith maintains that imagination is merely one of the ways in which we can reach these virtues through the process of reflection, and thus we must instead broaden the criteria for satisfying (iii). Even though Williams is correct that imagination can be used in a critical way to satisfy (iii), there are also other satisfactory routes when deliberating correctly, and so Williams account although correct, needs supplementation.

When we understand (iii) as incorporating a systematically justifiable principle, such as that of reflective equilibrium, we can begin to formulate precisely how desires may be united into cohesive groups to form virtues. As Rawls claims, we present a certain set of shared

conditions, and “then see if these conditions are strong enough to yield a significant set of principles. If not, we look for further premises equally reasonable. (R18) And further, as Parfit claims, when we are deciding upon what is virtuous, “we could justifiably reject any Contractualist formula if this formula’s implications conflict too often and too strongly with our intuitive moral beliefs.” (370) Therefore, by using a Contractualist principle, such as Rawls presents, we could arrive at those desires which satisfy our intuitive moral beliefs, and also are those which any rational agent could will.

With an understanding of how Smith uses reflective equilibrium as a tool for correct deliberation, we arrive at Smith’s more important claim that we can “think of the moral requirements that apply to agents as themselves categorical requirements of rationality or reason.”(S85) Obviously this is contrary to Parfit’s claims (as will be shown in Chapter 4), since, according to Parfit, only substantive appeals may generate categorical requirements. However, it will be necessary to glean from Smith’s argument how he may claim categorical appeals within desires, as this will be a major contention for Parfit.

Smith claims that the argument against the rationalists’ claim, such as that put forward by Philippa Foot, that “it is a conceptual truth that requirements of rationality or reason are hypothetical imperatives... is false.” (S84) Instead, according to Smith, it seems much more plausible that “it is in fact a conceptual truth that requirements of rationality or reason are categorical imperatives, not hypothetical imperatives.” (S84) Foot argues that practical rationality is a system of hypothetical imperatives, and thus if morality is fully dependent upon rationality, morality as well must consist of hypothetical imperatives. As Foot writes,

It is uncertain whether the doctrine of the categorical imperative even makes sense. The conclusion we should draw is that moral



judgments have no better claim to be categorical imperatives than do statements about matters of etiquette.<sup>25</sup>

In response to challenges, such as that by Foot, Smith presents his positive account of categorical reasons, which come about through a rational and deliberative process. The foundation for this process lies within a conjunction of both Williams' three conditions, as well as a dependence upon Rawls' account of reflective equilibrium. For Smith, we have reason to act in some way when all three of Williams' conditions are met, and we properly understand (iii) as implying a more robust notion of deliberation which is supported by those desires which are systematically justifiable. The moral requirements which rational agents have are only required of them because they are categorical requirements for all rational agents. Through the use of Williams' three conditions, an agent who has all relevant beliefs, no false beliefs, and deliberates correctly would be able to correctly judge what he has reason to do. Therefore, since "our judgments about what we are morally required to do are simply judgments about what the categorical requirements of rationality or reason demand of us," (S91) when we judge correctly, we also follow the categorical imperatives which correspond to correct deliberation.

One of the procedural rules which Smith claims that we are required to integrate into our desires is "a more coherent and unified desiderative profile and evaluative outlook." (S159) According to Smith, the unity of our desires under a coherent desiderative profile allows for the explanation of irrational desires and preferences. This unity is achieved through systematic justification, and motivates the conclusion that all desires which fall outside of this justification are irrational, and therefore do not generate reasons.

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<sup>25</sup> Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," 312.

Therefore, all desires which are systematically justifiable, according to Smith, fit within the structure of correct deliberation, and thus should be seen as imperatives which are categorical. According to Smith, there are categorical demands placed upon us as rational agents. This is not substantially dissimilar to Williams, but by depending upon categorical demands of reason in this way Smith appears to provide substantive justification to subjective appeals which Williams seems less able to provide.

#### **Section 4: Internalism and Practical Reason**

In her essay, "Skepticism about practical reason," Christine Korsgaard claims that "it seems to be a requirement on practical reasons, that they be capable of motivating us." (K317) Following what Korsgaard calls, "the Kantian approach to moral philosophy", she claims that the focus of ethics, which is based upon practical reason, should be "explained in terms of rational standards that apply directly to conduct or to deliberation." (K311)

Korsgaard is primarily concerned with defending the use of practical reason within ethics, but through her defense she also concludes that practical reasons must also satisfy what she calls the *internalism requirement*. (K317) Korsgaard establishes this requirement by arguing "that unless reasons are motives, they cannot prompt or explain actions. And, unless reasons are motives, we cannot be said to be practically rational." (K317) The *internalism requirement* which Korsgaard presents draws explicitly upon Williams' account of deliberation and provides a route to reasons which are acquired through deliberation. These reasons, which although not ends or desires, but instead principles of pure practical reason, nevertheless, should be considered members of S.

Williams, as has been shown, argues that only members of S have the ability to motivate us which poses an apparent problem if we are to arrive at reasons through practical reason. Since practical reasons are usually phrased in terms of principles, and principles typically are thought of as external to the agent, Williams is skeptical about the ability of practical reason to motivate. Yet, Korsgaard claims that “pure practical reason will exist if and only if we are capable of being motivated by the conclusions of the operations of pure practical reason as such.” (K328) If Korsgaard is correct, and there is something in us capable of being motivated by the conclusions of practical reason, then that part of practical reason must already be a member of S. As Korsgaard states,

What seems to follow from the internalism requirement is this: if we can be motivated by considerations stemming from pure practical reason, then that capacity belongs to the subjective motivational set of every rational being. (K328)

The conclusion which Korsgaard draws should be seen as consistent with Williams’ own, namely, that there are “necessary contents of the S of any rational agent.”<sup>26</sup> Korsgaard believes that applying pure practical reason in this way is analogous to William’s insistence upon policies such as prudence. Appeals to pure practical reason are considered as necessary for rational deliberation, since they have a correlate within S which is capable of generating an internal reason for following such a principle. Korsgaard provides not only, as she sees it, a necessary connection between rational deliberation and practical reason, but makes the stronger claim that the combination of practical reason (through deliberation) and our desires, generate notions of the good, which then supplies us with reasons. As Korsgaard claims, “most things that are good, are good because of the interest human beings have in them...most of our ends

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<sup>26</sup> Williams, *Philosophy as Humanistic Discipline*, 111.

are conditioned goods because their value depends on the conditions of human existence, and the needs and desires to which those conditions give rise.” (K225) Those goods which are generated through practical reason are motivational in the sense that they satisfy the Internalist demand, but they are members of S on a categorical and fundamental level.

Therefore, it is not the case, as Williams thought, that principles are not able to have as a feature a corresponding relation to S which allows them to create internal reasons. The internalism requirement is supposed to limit those principles or policies which are capable of being members of S, but Korsgaard claims that the requirement has the opposite effect. As Korsgaard claims, Williams does not give an account of how possible accounts of unconditional principles would motivate us, since “he only thinks there are none.”(K329) Williams instead “believes that the principles are acquired by education, training, and so forth, and that they do not admit of any ultimate justification.” (K328) If we accept Korsgaard’s conclusion, as I will argue later that we should, at least in some respects, the internalism requirement can be seen as being satisfied by pure practical reason. When we satisfy the internalism requirement in this way, we must however place limitations upon pure practical reason, or, as Korsgaard claims, we face a reduction ad absurdum, since we allow the possibility that under this account “there is probably no moral theory that it excludes.” (K329)

If the internalism requirement could be satisfied in such a broad manner, and lacked the ability to exclude any moral theory whatsoever, it would be a useless demand placed upon ethics. Instead, as Korsgaard claims, it is a requirement placed upon psychological positions of agents, and “what it does is not to refute ethical theories, but to make a psychological demand on them.” (K329) By claiming that the internalism requirement is a psychological, and not an

ethical requirement, Korsgaard is able to maintain principles of pure practical reason, and still limit the breadth and scope of the principles which are applicable within ethical theories.

Williams' account of reasons is insufficient for Korsgaard since Williams does not think that principles derived through pure practical reason can provide internal reasons that can motivate. Instead, since pure practical reason can provide universal, substantive claims, pure practical reason, according to Korsgaard, is necessary when constructing ethical theories. Yet, we cannot ground ethical theories without also satisfying the internalism requirement, but since this is done by appealing to a psychological requirement, Korsgaard seems able to justify both the use of pure practical reason in a way that Williams cannot, and also meet the internalism requirement, which she admits is a necessary component of reasons.

## CHAPTER 4: THE IMPLAUSIBILITY OF SUBJECTIVE THEORIES

In Chapter 1 I presented the conditions under which subjectivists claim to generate reasons. According to subjectivist theories, reasons are generated when we have ideal deliberation (fully informed and procedurally rational) that are founded upon desires, aims, or choice-based goals. Parfit contends that even when these ideal conditions are met, subjectivists are unable to adhere to substantive claims, and as such subjectivist theories fail to provide normativity. However, aside from these basic claims of the limits of subjective normativity, Parfit contends that when we carry subjective theories to their logical conclusions, they often have implausible implications which subjectivists themselves cannot rationally maintain. In this Chapter I will focus on these conclusions which are drawn out through what Parfit calls, the *Agony*, *All or None*, and *Incoherence* arguments.

Each of the three respective arguments are aimed at providing a sufficient foundation for concluding that subjectivism is false. By either showing that subjectivists depend upon implausible implications, or that subjectivists depend upon substantive, object-given facts to provide reasons, Parfit attempts to show that subjectivism fails as a theory to provide reasons.

### Section 1: The Agony Argument

*The Agony Argument* attempts to prove that subjectivists cannot adhere to simple pre-analytical claims, such as; ‘all humans ought to avoid, and try to avoid all future agony.’ As Parfit claims, “If we can have some reasons, nothing is clearer than the truth that, in the reason-implying sense, it is bad to be in agony.” (82) This truth is readily accepted by subjectivists and objectivists alike, but Parfit argues that, not only are subjectivists denied the

conclusion that agony should always be avoided when possible, but viewing agony in this way renders the subjectivist viewpoint self-defeating.

*The Agony Argument* claims that,

We all have reason to want to avoid, and to try to avoid all future agony.

Subjectivism implies that we have no such reason.

Therefore

Subjectivism is false. (76)

Parfit believes that the first premise of *The Agony Argument* is a basic intuition that should plausibly hold for all moral theories. However, Parfit also claims that the fact that we have reason to want to avoid all future agony is a substantively based appeal, and is therefore only open to some form of value-based objective theory. Object-based theories are the only ones which may claim that “facts about our *future* desires give us reason.”(74) Therefore it must be shown how the first premise of *The Agony Argument*<sup>27</sup> is limited only to object-based theories, and why subjectivism implies that we can have no such reasons.

To illustrate why he believes subjectivism cannot account for future desires, Parfit asks us to consider a case in which an agent knows that some future event will cause them a period of agony. Even after ideal deliberation they still have no present desire to avoid this future agony, which prompts Parfit to conclude that, “since I have no such desire or aim, all subjective theories imply that I have no reason to want to avoid this agony, and no reason to try to avoid it, if I can.” (74) Because, as Parfit claims, “Subjectivists claim that our reasons depend on what,

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<sup>27</sup> Henceforth in this thesis labeled as (A).

after ideal deliberation, we would *choose*,” (74)<sup>28</sup> and not upon what reasons we would have after ideal deliberation, subjectivist theories cannot imply that the agent above has a reason to try and avoid this period of future agony. Even though the agent knows that he will later have a strong present desire to not be in his agonizing state, he nevertheless has no current desire which is motivating him to avoid this future agony, and thus subjectivists cannot claim a normative reason to avoid said future agony.

The critique which Parfit levels against subjectivists through (A) hinges upon the idea that subjectivists can only assert the formation of reasons through *present* desires, and “it is only certain facts about our own *present* desires, aims, or choices that give us reasons, or on which our reasons depend.” (75) However, these critiques focus solely upon our present desires and thus are properly limited to the *Desire-Based*, *Telic Desire*, *Error-Free*, and *Informed Desire Theories*, of which Parfit dismisses as weak formulations of subjectivism. Instead, for (A) to hold as correctly proving, as it purports to do, that subjectivism is false, it must engage *The Deliberative Theory*, which Parfit himself presents as the most plausible, or adequate version of subjectivism.

Parfit contends, as was shown in Chapter 1, that Deliberative Subjectivists are limited to procedural rationality, and for this reason cannot espouse substantive appeals about what we have reasons to do. I will attempt to show that this is in fact false in the following chapter, but for now, this distinction is important in understanding Parfit’s response to the deliberative Subjectivists in the application of (A). As Parfit claims, Deliberative Subjectivists might respond to (A) by claiming

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<sup>28</sup> Italics mine.



(A) We all have reasons to have those desires that would be had by anyone who was fully rational.

(B) Anyone who was fully rational would want to avoid all future agony

Therefore

We all have a reason to want to avoid all future agony. (78)

This argument, according to Parfit, is “ambiguous” due to the fact that Objectivists can accept (B), and that in order for (A) to hold true, we must appeal to substantive rationality, which is closed to subjectivists. There is a substantive object-given reason to want to avoid all future agony which is provided by the meta-hedonic desire to not be in conscious states that we dislike. This meta-hedonic desire is only open to objectivists though, since it depends upon object-given facts about what we have reason to want. As Parfit claims, “we have strong reasons to want to be having, and to go on having, sensations that we intensely like. We have even stronger reasons to want not to be in agony, by having sensations that, for no reason, we intensely dislike.” (56) These reasons provide object-given normative obligations to attempt to avoid future situations that we intensely dislike, such as those that involve agony; whereas, since subjectivists, according to Parfit, can only ever maintain procedural rationality, they are denied these object-given reasons about future events. Thus Deliberative Subjectivists can appeal to procedural rationality, but, since they cannot appeal to substantive object-given reasons, they cannot claim that the avoidance of agony is a future desire that humans must adhere to. Therefore, Parfit believes we can return to the original formulation of *The Agony Argument* and claim that Subjectivism is false.

*The Agony Argument* is meant to show that subjectivism is false, and Parfit claims that the argument sufficiently establishes this falsity. There is, however, one last option which Parfit claims is open to subjectivists, and that is to claim,

(E) the nature of agony gives us no reason to want to avoid being in agony. (81)

Yet, in adhering to (E), subjectivists are dismissing the apparent pre-analytic intuition that agony is always something which we should avoid. Although claiming (E) does not lead subjectivists into a logical problem, such as their claim that we can have subjective reasons which by themselves generate a reason to avoid agony; we, nevertheless, ought to reject (E) since it is a “very implausible belief.” (82) Therefore, Parfit concludes that since subjectivism cannot account for the commonsensical pre-analytic intuition to always try and avoid agony, whenever possible, and objective theories, such as his own, can provide reasons to try and avoid agony, we ought to reject subjective theories in favor of some object-based theory.

What is important to note, however, is that Parfit does not exclude the fact that there are some telic desires which we are rationally required to have.<sup>29</sup> Instead, Parfit only claims that the desire to avoid agony is not one of these desires. As Parfit says, “On subjective theories, we have no such object-given reasons, not even reasons to want to avoid future agony... except perhaps for the few desires without which we could not even be agents, there are no telic desires or aims that we are rationally required to have.” (78) The acceptance of possible desires which are rationally required to claim agent status seriously undermines Parfit’s contention

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<sup>29</sup> Here, Parfit is referring to Williams’ claim that “we must have ‘a desire not to fail through error’, and some ‘modest amount of prudence,’” (Parfit, 78) and (Williams, 111).

that Subjectivists cannot appeal to substantive reasons. It is not important at this point which desires Parfit accepts as rationally required--only that there are some.

The fact that there are some telic desires which we must possess to be considered rational agents presents an apparent problem for Parfit, and one which he addresses through the work of Michael Smith. As was seen earlier, Smith claims that moral requirements are categorical requirements of rationality which are based in deliberation, and also systematically justifiable. Smith believes that by defining morality in this way we can account for and explain the irrationality of many desires and preferences. Furthermore, Smith, like Williams, believes that we must have certain procedural desires, and are required to not have "desires or preferences that draw some arbitrary distinction." (79) This route, however, conversely to that of Williams insistence upon prudence and a desire not to fail through error, is not open to Subjectivists because we can only define 'arbitrary' in terms of certain facts that give us reasons to have certain preferences. For example, Parfit presents us with what he calls the *Future Tuesday Indifference* scenario, in which,

[some] man cares about his own future pleasures or pains, except when they will come on any future Tuesday. This strange attitude does not depend on ignorance or false beliefs. Pain on Tuesdays, this man knows, would be just as painful, and just as much *his* pain, and Tuesdays are just like other days of the week. Even so, given the choice, this man would now prefer agony on any future Tuesday to slight pain on any other future day. (56)

Smith would claim that this man's preferences are irrational since they draw an arbitrary distinction which would not satisfy either ideal deliberation, or be systematically justifiable. Yet, this potential response by Smith is unsatisfactory, since, according to Parfit, in order to explain why this preference is arbitrary, we must claim

(1) if some ordeal would be on a future Tuesday, this fact does not give us any reason to care about it less.

And

(2) if some ordeal would be less painful, this fact *does* give us a reason to care about it less. (79)

(1) and (2) however, “are claims about object-given reasons,” (79) and since object-given reasons are denied by subjectivists, Parfit claims that claims such as (1) and (2), Smith’s minimal principle of rationality, or Williams’ appeals to prudence, are not open to them.

Since (E) provides us with an impractical account of normativity, to maintain a plausible account of morality we must return to the previous claim that, ‘we all have a reason to want to avoid, and try to avoid, all future agony.’ Yet by returning to this claim, which necessitates the use of object-given reasons, according to Parfit, we must conclude that Subjectivism is false.

## **Section 2: The All or None Argument**

The *Agony Argument* attempts to show that Subjective theories result in implausible or unacceptable implications. However, the *Agony Argument* can only provide an account of the impracticality of Subjectivism, to provide a more robust substantive attack against Subjectivism another argument is needed; that argument is provided in the form of *the All or None Argument*.<sup>30</sup>

Through ANA Parfit claims that either all desires generate reasons, much like the Humean model that Williams argues against, or, that no desires have this capability. It would be decidedly counter intuitive for any Subjectivists to claim adherence to either of these, for

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<sup>30</sup> Henceforth in this thesis referred to as (ANA).

various reasons presented previously, and so Parfit believes that if these are the only two options then we can label Subjectivism as false.

As shown through both DT and William's model of reasons, the most plausible account of Subjectivism is provided through an appeal to deliberative routes, which claim that agents have reason to act upon their fully informed and rational desires. Yet, more than just insisting upon the need for ideal deliberation, it appears as though we must also accept Smith's claim that there are certain desires which must be in place if we are to be considered rational agents.

Even though subjectivists would accept a combination of DT and Smith's claims, we cannot, however, as Parfit claims, include agony into the set of telic desires which Smith argues for, nor can we claim that agony is precluded by ideal deliberation. Although it is hard to imagine that anyone could want to have a future period of agony, Parfit argues that, it is at least "conceivable, that someone might want future agony for its own sake." (84) Therefore, according to Parfit, subjectivists must claim that when we desire agony for its own sake we have a reason to try and make this agony come about.

If we return to the agent who wants to be in agony for its own sake, and assume that the agent is rational and goes through a process of ideal deliberation, we see that subjectivists are left with two responses to the agent's desire: Subjectivists must either claim that he has a reason to want to be in agony, or that this desire does not give him a reason to want to be in agony. Since subjectivists must elude the impractical implications which follow if they adhere to the claim that they have a reason to be in agony, they must argue for the ability to deliberate in such a way that through deliberation some desires are found to be unable to provide reasons. However, as Parfit claims, subjectivists cannot distinguish between desires or aims that give us

reasons, and those that don't. (89) Parfit claims that this is not possible, since in the act of choosing between desires we are placing value on certain desires over others in a way that has no meaning without value-based object-given reasons.

Because subjectivists cannot appeal to a valuation of certain desires in order to claim that they are impotent in terms of creating reasons, when we are considering cases where all of the relevant facts are known, we can argue

If we have desire-based reasons for acting, all that would matter is *whether* some act would fulfill the telic desires that we now have after ideal deliberation. It would be irrelevant *what* we want, or would be trying to achieve.

Therefore

Either all such desires give us reasons, or none of them do.

If all such desires gave us reasons, our desires could give us decisive reasons to cause ourselves to be in agony for its own sake, to waste our lives, and to try to achieve countless other bad or worthless aims.

We could not have such reasons

Therefore

None of these desires gives us any reason. We have no such desire-based and choice-based reasons. (90)

This argument (ANA) attempts to illustrate that given the claim that telic desires are capable of producing normative reasons, subjectivists are left with two options, neither of which is acceptable: either they can claim that all desires provide reasons, in which case the Humean problem has not been resolved, or, they can claim that some desires are incapable of

generating reasons. But in making this distinction they are conferring value upon some desires in such a way that depends upon object-given reasons.

Parfit claims that we have reasons to have certain telic desires, but that “these reasons are provided, not by the facts that these acts would fulfill or achieve these desires or aims, but by the features of what we want, or have as our aims.”(90) For example, using the case of future agony, when disallowing reasons that are generated in pursuit of this aim, according to Parfit, we must place a negative value upon agony in such a way that we have no reason to pursue agony, even though it is what we presently desire. This value cannot be subject-given since what is given by the subject is a desire to experience agony. Therefore this reason must be based upon facts about the nature of agony and our relation to it, which would then generate an object-given reason to try and avoid agony.

If, according to Parfit, what we have reason to do is grounded in what we want, or what we have as our aims, then our reasons depend upon value-based object-given reasons at their core. If, however, as subjectivists claim, we can deliberate between certain desires that provide reasons, and those that don’t, then without appealing to a valuation of desires perhaps a subject-given foundation for normativity can be saved. Subjectivists claim that at the beginning of any chain of reasons generated through telic desires there is some desire which we have no further reason to have, and is valued for its own sake. Subjectivists adhere to a view of desires which attempts to establish value within desires themselves. If Parfit is correct this is unwarranted, and Subjectivists are unable to sufficiently respond to the challenge of ANA. I will argue in the next chapter that Parfit is incorrect, and that there is no plausible reason to deny subjectivist appeals to substantive rational desires.

### Section 3: The Incoherence Argument

The previous arguments, A and ANA, claim to show that subjective theories have implausible implications, and that subjectivists must admit that no desires give us reasons. Since, according to Parfit, Subjectivists must accept all desires as generating reasons (which would render them unable to provide a satisfactory answer to the Humean problem), we must reject Subjective theories. Aside from the issues raised through *The Agony*, and *All or None* Arguments, there is, however, according to Parfit, another serious problem with subjective theories. The most plausible accounts of Subjectivism depend upon deliberation, and error-free desires, yet theories such as DT which depend upon fully informed error-free desires are incoherent.

Theories which rely upon deliberation and fully informed error-free desires are incoherent, according to Parfit, due to their reliance upon the rational consideration of certain facts. These theories, such as DT, depend upon substantive facts to determine what we have reason to do. Correct deliberation, in theories such as DT, is not possible without the re-evaluation of what we have reason to do, according to what we would do if certain facts were taken into account. As Parfit claims, however, “when we are deciding which outcomes we shall try to bring about, we ought in important cases try to discover, and rationally consider, what these outcomes would be like. But if we make this claim, we are assuming that

(O) these possible outcomes may have intrinsic features that would give us object-given reasons to want either to produce or to prevent these outcomes, if we can.

And (O) is what *Objectivists* believe, Subjectivists deny (O).” (93-94) Therefore, according to Parfit, proponents of theories such as DT must accept the validity of some object-given reasons,



and in doing so must reject Subjectivism as incoherent. The incoherence of these theories is due to their assumption of both,

(Q) our desires, aims, or choices give us reasons only if we would have these desires and aims, or make these choices, if we had true beliefs about all the relevant intrinsic features of what we want.

And that

(R) these features give us no reasons to want these things. (95)

Theories such as DT, which deny object-given reasons (R), but yet are dependent upon facts to provide reasons for acting which we don't currently desire (Q), are incoherent since, according to Parfit, they must simultaneously maintain the truth of Q and R at all times. The necessitation of both Q and R by Subjectivists provides what Parfit calls, the *Incoherence Argument against Subjectivism*. (95)

As provided in Chapter 1, DT is the most plausible form of Subjectivism due to its use of rational deliberation, and dependence upon fully informed error-free desires. Yet, the very requirements of rational deliberation, and fully informed error-free desires renders Subjective theories as incoherent, according to Parfit. The Incoherence is a result of the apparent need for fully-informed deliberation, which coincides with the claim

(M) what we have most reason to do is whatever would best fulfill, not our actual present telic desires or aims, but the desires or aims that we would now have, or would want ourselves to have, if we knew and had rationally considered all of the relevant facts. (93)

The incoherence that results from deliberative theories such as DT is from the reliance upon facts to inform desires. The reliance upon facts in our deliberative processes acts against DT since in reality it confers value upon facts in such a way that value is derived from those

facts, and not desires, as DT claims. According to Parfit, theories such as DT have a much 'subtler' problem; they rely on the very types of value-based objective reasons which they argue against. Formulations of Subjectivism, such as, *the Desire-Based Theory* and *the Telic Desire Theory* fail, according to Parfit, since they cannot account for how we decide between which desires provide reasons, and those that don't. Theories such as DT avoid the inability to differentiate between desires, but in doing so, Parfit contends that they appeal to object-given reasons, and therefore admit the very types of reasons which they are set against. As Parfit claims,

When many Subjectivists appeal to claims about what we would want or choose if we knew all the facts about the possible outcomes of our acts, these people rightly assume that these outcomes may have reason-giving features. Most of these people assume, for example, that we have object-given reasons to want to be happy, and to avoid agony. These people are not really Subjectivists. (96)

Therefore, according to Parfit, theories such as DT are incoherent because they are fundamentally dependent upon object, not subject, given reasons. This, Parfit claims, undermines Subjective theories in the most fundamental way, since it shows that even Subjectivists are not able to plausibly claim dependence upon subject-given reasons.

## CHAPTER 5: A DEFENSE OF SUBJECTIVE NORMATIVITY

### Section 1: The Categorical Necessity of Desires

Through a systematic analysis of the various forms of Subjectivism, Parfit concludes that Subjective theories fail to generate normativity, and therefore must be false. This conclusion is reached by enhancing the simplest subjective theories, such as, *the Desire-Based Theory*, *Telic Desire Theory*, *Error-Free Desire Theory*, and *Informed Desire Theory* which results in the acceptance of DT as the most plausible formulation of subjectivism. DT is proffered as the most coherent and viable form of Subjectivism and it is upon this formulation that Parfit presents his most scathing critiques. In this chapter I will present a multifaceted defense of both DT and Subjective normativity in general, and show that the critical limitations which Parfit diagnoses Subjectivist theories as containing do not exist.

The critical limitations which appear to destabilize Subjective theories are not focused solely upon DT, but rather on Subjective justifications of any kind, as such, due to the wide-ranging nature of Parfit's critique, I will first address the claims about subjective reasons, which were addressed in Chapter 1, followed by the specific issues raised in addressing DT. Many of the challenges against subjective reasons will inherently lead to a discussion of DT, but since several of them do not necessitate an appeal to DT it will be helpful to examine them on their own merits.

Parfit contends that the most pernicious issue within normative theories which depend upon subject-given reasons is the inability for desire based-theories to appeal to substantive rationality. Yet, there is a deeper problem, according to Parfit, which undermines all Subjective theories: namely that all desire based theories inherently depend upon object-given facts, and

as such are self-defeating. Parfit claims that when Subjectivists espouse normative force emanating from desires, it is due to their unknown adherence to the use of object-given facts. For example, when we consider the agent who is confronted with the poisonous snake, Parfit believes that normative force to not run is provided by facts alone. It is Parfit's contention that an agent who is in possession of all of the facts will correctly choose to remain still, and this choice is normatively based solely within the knowledge of these facts. Parfit uses his explication of object-given reasons to claim that what we have normative reason to do depends exclusively upon these facts, and therefore it cannot be desires which provide reasons.

Yet, I believe that there is a critical flaw that is present within Parfit's argument, the omission of motivational concerns. Parfit claims to derive normativity exclusively from facts, however, because he explains normativity in this way Parfit believes he is justified in dismissing motivational concerns.. As Parfit claims, "since I shall not be discussing why people act as they do, I shall say little about motivational reasons." (37) However, since Parfit excludes a motivational component within normativity, the objective theory which he presents is unable to engage the internalism requirement. If Korsgaard is correct, as I believe she is, then practical reasons must be able to motivate us. Yet, Parfit has no account of how this may be possible since he admittedly does not find motivation to be an important demand of normativity.

Due to Parfit's lack of concern for motivational force, and thus the internalism requirement, in cases such as *Snake*, by only taking into account the relevant reason-implying facts the generation of normative force to not run is not possible. The facts alone provide the factual outcome of the different scenarios, i.e. that running will cause the snake to attack, and that standing still will result in the snake staying docile. Parfit presupposes that a rational agent

who possesses the facts that running will cause the snake to attack, thus implying death, and not running will cause the snake to remain docile, would necessarily conclude that the facts dictate in a strongly decisive way that the agent should not run. Yet the conclusion that the agent should not run is only possible *if* one presupposes that there is a fact that the agent should have the intention to live. If the agent desires to die then the facts of the snake's disposition of only attacking moving objects would rationally compel the agent to run.

Facts in themselves may only provide the agent with the relative knowledge of the different outcomes possible depending on which action the agent would choose. There is a fact that the snake will attack if the agent runs, and there is a fact that the agent will die if bitten. There is also a fact that not running will cause the snake to become docile and thus the agent will not die from the snake. These facts are merely those objective facts which provide the agent with an understanding of the consequences of either running or staying still. If the agent does not invoke some principle of action once he knows these objective facts, he will not be supplied with reasons for action. The reasons are only supplied once the agent has a principle for what would be best given the particular facts.

Facts may provide knowledge of how one ought to act depending upon what one desires as an outcome, but without motivational reasons facts alone are impotent in generating reasons. One of Parfit's critiques against subjective theories is that subjective theories are incoherent because they depend upon an adherence to object-given reasons. Yet, Subjectivists can claim that the argument runs just as plausibly the other way. If an agent has strong motivation and desire to live, then this provides a reason to seek out those facts which will make this possible. It would be plausible to claim that the reason to not run is given by this

desire, and that the facts are merely procedural or instrumental means in accomplishing this desire.

In order to respond to this objection, Parfit most likely would offer an account of the ways in which a fact can be good or bad. Parfit appeals to the idea of the good, which is meant to illuminate certain qualities about facts, which would give an agent reasons.

When we call something,

*good*, in what we can call the *reason-implying sense* we mean roughly that there are certain kinds of facts about this thing's nature, or properties, that would in certain situations give us or others strong reasons to respond to this thing in some positive way, such as wanting, choosing, using, producing, or preserving this thing. (38)

The properties which give us strong reasons to respond to a thing in a positive way would be seen as part of the very nature of what the thing provides to us. These properties must be seen as essential qualities of the thing in question, and are "good for us, in the sense of being in our interests, benefiting us, or contributing to our well-being." (39) Those things which contribute to our well-being are "intrinsically" good for us since they are "the features of our lives in which our well-being consists...[and are]... the features that make our lives worth living." (39) Since these properties would be an essential part of the thing, they would be seen as relevant reason-implying facts, and these facts would give us reasons, since they would generate a positive response to this thing for an agent.

Let us return back to *Snake*. As said before, there are certain facts about the different actions an agent may perform. Parfit believes that when we add these facts to what is, "good for us," these facts provide reasons for our acting in one way and not another. For Parfit, an agent which found himself in *snake* would have decisive reasons not to run since his well-being

would best be promoted through not being bitten. Thus, since not running would be best for the agent, this supplies a principle to guide the facts, and provides a decisive reason to not run.

Again, though, Subjectivists can respond by claiming that the idea of the good which Parfit is depending upon is simply a subject-given value claim. Subjectivists may instead claim that what is good for us, and any corresponding reasons to respond to things in positive ways focus primarily upon types of motivation. Just as Parfit claims that subjectivists undermine their own accounts of reasons by appealing to facts, Subjectivists may claim that Parfit does the same in claiming that we ought to respond to certain facts such that we should want certain events to come about. It is unclear, however, why we should see facts as having the ability to provide the capacity to influence how we should “respond” to these facts, since Parfit does not believe that what is normative implies a motivational component. As Parfit claims, “object-given value-based reasons cannot be regarded in such ways [linked with motivational concerns], since we have such reasons [to act] even if we would *not* be moved or motivated to act upon them.” (110)

According to Parfit, facts provide reasons, but they do not necessitate motivation. Because of this, in cases such as *Snake*, the agent must correctly realize that he should not run, but he is, however, just as likely to be unmotivated to choose any particular course of action. By failing to necessitate motivational concerns Parfit not only fails to correctly involve the use of the internalism requirement, but due to this failure must in some way depend upon the use of desire. Since Parfit has no way to incorporate the internalism requirement, the only plausible way in which an agent could be moved to have a preference in regards to facts is to incorporate a desire for some potential thing or outcome. Yet, if Parfit incorporates desire in such a way

then in claiming that facts alone provide reasons, it seems that Parfit is using desires in a fundamental way, much like he claims Subjectivists depend upon facts.

The inability of Parfit's account of normativity to appeal to motivational concerns does not inherently undermine his claim that normativity is provided solely through object-given facts, but, it does invalidate Parfit's specific account of reasons. Because, on Parfit's account, normativity has no bearing upon moral motivation, it appears as though he is dependent upon desire in a fundamental way, since he is unable to satisfy the internalism requirement through facts alone. Thus Subjectivists can argue that just as they may be dependent upon facts, Parfit is equally obliged to fundamentally incorporate desires.

Parfit's lack of concern for motivation renders his form of objectivism as severely weakened when the *Incoherence Argument* is directed at his own theory, but as claimed this only renders Parfit's own objective account flawed. By itself it is not a sufficient defense of Subjectivism. Instead, a more robust defense must be provided, one which is found through an analysis of DT, as well as the *Agony*, and *All or None* arguments. Since many of the most potent claims leveled against subjective theories are aimed at DT, and it is consequently only through DT that Subjectivists can mount a sufficient response to Parfit, I will turn now to DT.

The strongest and allegedly the most destructive objection which Parfit directs at Subjective theories, and in particular DT, is that substantive appeals are only possible when we take into account object-given facts. Although Subjectivists can appeal to procedural rationality, and this can provide instrumental reasons to perform certain actions, normative force, according to Parfit, can only be generated through the use of substantively rational deliberation. Since, as Parfit claims, substantive rationality is inaccessible to Subjectivists, and



specifically Deliberative Subjectivists, normativity cannot be generated through subject-given reasons, and thus we should reject Subjectivism as false. I believe, however, that a more expansive defense of subject-given reasons is possible, and that this defense can provide a plausible account of normativity generated exclusively out of procedural rationality. With this robust defense Parfit's criticisms of subjectivism should be seen as unable to invalidate subjective theories.

In his denial of subject-given reasons, Parfit addresses the claims of Rawls, Williams, and Smith, among others, and attempts to show that they are unable to qualify their own conceptions of normativity through the use of substantive rationality. It is my contention that Parfit is mistaken in his view that what subjectivists are able to accomplish through deliberative appeals is severely limited. I shall also argue that through the deliberative theories of Rawls, Williams, and Smith, subjectivists can provide a plausible, non-objectively formulated account of normativity.

Although Parfit claims that substantive rationality is not open to subjectivists, since substantive rationality must depend upon object-given facts, I contend that this view of substantive reasons is flawed since it conflates object-given reasons with categorical necessitation (which, as I will argue shortly, is something subjectivists can account for). Parfit depends upon an implicit assumption that object-given reasons are categorical demands placed upon agents, and that these demands, because they are object-given, are closed to subjectivists. According to Parfit, these categorical demands are only open to object based theories since they depend upon the use of substantive rationality.

As already presented, according to Parfit, substantive rationality is distinct from its procedural counterpart, since it places emphasis upon *what* we choose, whereas procedural rationality is limited to *how* we make our choices. Due to this difference in how reasons are generated, Parfit claims we can use this distinction to show that subjective theories are implausible at best, and at worst wholly incapable of generating reasons.

If we return to *the Agony Argument*, and Parfit's claim that even after ideal deliberation we may conceive of an agent who has no desire to avoid future agony, I believe that there are two highly plausible responses which may be given in defense of subjective theories: first, that the agent who undergoes ideal deliberation is incapable of being indifferent to future periods of agony, and second, that in responding to this argument, contrary to Parfit's objection, subjectivists can generate reasons about future events without appealing to object-given reasons. Through an analysis of these two claims, I will claim that it is possible to generate subjectively given categorical demands upon rationality, which satisfy the concerns of what we choose, and yet nevertheless are derived through procedural rationality alone, and are thus purely subject-given.

The view of subject-given reasons which Parfit provides is one which cannot escape the implausible implications of the Humean problem. Through *the Agony Argument* and *All or None Arguments* Parfit argues that DT, which is the best subjective theory, provides little to no further help for Subjectivists when confronted with the Humean problem, since substantive rationality is not open to proponents of DT. According to Parfit, to satisfy the *Agony Argument* we must appeal to value-based claims, which is not possible for subjectivists, and thus we must either accept that (1) we have a reason to be in future agony, or (2) that the desire for future

agony does not generate reasons. If we accept (1), we run against our pre-analytic intuition for the need to avoid agony; yet, if we accept (2), then we must accept *the All or None Argument*, and thus claim that if some desires generate reasons, then all desires do, or rather, in this case that if some desires do not generate reasons, than none do.

Parfit's denial of subjective theories depends solely upon the inability of these theories to provide any possible route through which substantive object-given facts may be employed. I believe, however, that there is a functionally equivalent subject-given route which Parfit does not consider, and which can be inserted in place of substantive rationality, because uniformed necessary desires are required of all rational agents (of which agony plausibly seems to be).

Admittedly, Parfit dismisses this possibility, claiming instead that although some Subjectivists might argue that "there would be some telic desires that everyone must have, because without these desires these people could not even be rational agents...such claims are irrelevant." (77) These claims, according to Parfit, are 'irrelevant' since they are actually dependent upon desires which people have object-given reasons to have. Parfit's claim, however, limits the ability to appeal to any plausibly coherent sense of human psychology, or even a moderately understandable account of desire, and as such, I believe we ought to reject this analysis.

In describing a plausible account of normativity, or any account of reasons, we must assume at least some basic elements of agency upon which to operate. At the very least, some account of rationality seems to be one of these elements, and this seems to be a foundational component for many of the most acceptable moral theories. If we accept rational deliberation as the foundation for the basis of normativity (which, I believe, Parfit is willing to accept) then

we must explicate the characteristics of this deliberation which give power to generate normativity. Subjectivists claim that there are procedural rules, which when adhered to, and combined with desires, allow for an acceptable account of ideal deliberation. Objectivists, such as Parfit, however, claim that ideal deliberation must also incorporate object-given substantive appeals, and thus subjective theories are inadequate. Yet, I believe that Objectivists overvalue the use of substantive rationality, as well as object-given facts, and thus fail to realize to what extent procedural rationality can, in a simpler and more accessible way, play the role of object-given facts in Objectivism.

As I previously claimed, I believe that much of the apparent strength of the *Agony*, and *All or None* arguments, lies in the implicit (albeit mistaken) assumption that like object-given facts, categorical demands of rationality are also inaccessible to subjectivists. Parfit rejects Williams' appeal to prudence as irrelevant, and Smith's claim that rational desires need to fit a coherent and unified desiderative profile due to its dependence upon object-given facts. The dismissal of categorical demands placed upon subject-given rationality is, however, I believe, unwarranted.

Human rationality must have not only demands, but also practical limitations placed upon it if it is to satisfy any logical account of what we consider to be reasonable. One of the most plausible limitations that ought to be seen as necessary is, as Bernard Williams says, "that an agent is committed in general to acting in the light of sound information, simply by being a rational agent; included in the S of every rational agent is a desire not to fail through error."<sup>31</sup> Parfit rejects this claim as irrelevant when examining agony by claiming that the desire to avoid

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<sup>31</sup> Williams, *Philosophy as Humanistic Discipline*, 111.

future agony is not the type of desire such that it must be a member of S (an agent's subjective motivational set) of every rational agent. This claim by Parfit's is mistaken, however, for two reasons: first, agony, as it should be properly understood, is necessarily a desire that rational agents wish to avoid, and second, when subjectivists make this claim they may do so from a purely procedural account, and do not need to invoke object-given facts.

Through an analysis of Williams' claim that we must desire to not fail through error it is possible to see that a desire to avoid agony is analogously a categorical demand of procedural reason. When using procedural rationality, in order to correctly determine what procedure or rule is needed to accomplish whatever task we may have, we must be able to correctly assess what outcomes our actions will produce. Through the use of fully informed rational deliberation we can understand that, all things being equal, when we are determining which procedures are needed, and we base our reasons exclusively upon this deliberation, we are only appealing to procedural rationality. If we view procedural rationality in this way, we can see why Williams believes that the desire to not fail through error is a necessary desire included in the S of all rational agents. If an agent had some desire, it would undermine our ability to see this agent as rational if they desired to fail in accomplishing to bring about the thing which they desired. It is not logically coherent to claim that we can both desire some outcome, and yet also wish to fail to satisfy this desire through error, since this equates to wishing that we did not fulfill the very desire we wished to fulfill. For example, it is incoherent to claim that I both desire to score well on an evaluation, and also to fail to score well on that evaluation due to some error on my part. These two desires are rationally opposed to each other, and if I adhere to one I would have to fail to adhere to the other. Therefore it seems that Williams' demand placed upon procedural

rationality, that we must desire not to fail through error, is a categorical demand of all rational agents, because if this does not hold true, it is unclear how any agent could be claimed to be rational.

I believe that at this point it is possible to see that there is also a demand of prudential considerations placed upon the desires of rational agents. Since we must desire not to fail through error, we must desire that, when possible, we try prudently to actualize those things which we desire. If this is true, then I believe that we can include the desire to avoid future agony as one of these prudential considerations. If we examine what characteristics agony consists of then we should see this is a fairly evident demand of rationality. Agony is a physical or mental state that a particular agent has a strong aversion to, and by physical necessity strongly desires to avoid. Any physical or mental state which an agent has this strong negative correlative response to may be claimed to be a state of agony. Now, if we understand that agony is that state which an agent has such a strong natural aversion to, and thus desires to not experience, then it seems quite obvious that no fully informed rational agent could have a future desire to be in this state, and that this requirement is provided by procedural rationality alone. If, by definition, agony is a physical or mental state which an agent has a strong aversion to, and in fact, a desire to avoid, then no agent who is fully informed could wish to bring this state about. Since a fully informed agent would know that this future state is agony, and that agony is a state which they strongly desire to not experience, they could not desire to experience that which they desire not to experience.

The desire to avoid future agony, when possible, must be a categorical demand of reason. If we know that some future event will be agony for us, and we also know that agony is,

by definition, that which we desire to not experience, through a process of procedural rationality we can determine that we cannot desire to experience future agony, since this would cause a conflict in our rational process. If one of the demands of procedural rationality is that we follow procedural rules, and in desiring future agony we are both desiring that A come about, and that not A come about, we must claim that a desire for future agony violates the fundamental rule of consistency in our deliberation. We must instead reject the notion that an agent who is procedurally rational can have a present or future desire to be in agony.

Parfit would reject this conclusion since he believes that even ideal deliberation does not necessarily provide us with desires for future states of affairs. Parfit asks us to consider,

*Case One*, I know that some future event would cause me to have some period of agony. Even after ideal deliberation, I have no desire to avoid this agony. Nor do I have any other desire or aim whose fulfillment would be prevented either by this agony, or by my having no desire to avoid this agony. (74)

Parfit claims that the only plausible defense that can be given in support of *Case One* is “that facts about our *future* desires give us reasons.” (74) But, since this defense depends upon future facts it is a value-based objective theory, and thus by definition not open to subjectivists. Therefore, since Parfit rejects the possibility of agony being a categorical demand of rationality, he thinks that when subjectivists attempt to provide reasons to avoid future agony they are appealing to substantive rationality, and thus invoking object-based reasons.

This contention by Parfit, however, misrepresents and confuses the procedural value of DT. An agent who undergoes ideal deliberation can never lack the desire to avoid either present or future agony. Parfit defines ideal deliberation as “fully informed and procedurally rational deliberation,”(63) but denies any capacity for our future desires to generate reasons. Yet, if we

accept Parfit's definition of ideal deliberation, there is no impetus to appeal to substantive rationality, since *Case One* is clearly impossible under ideal deliberation. If an agent is fully informed about all present and future eventual outcomes, and knows that some choice will lead to agony, then he would necessarily desire to avoid this state. If agony is simply the presence of some state which we do not want to be in, and we are fully informed, then it is a demand of procedural rationality that we would do that which would keep us from being in that state. If an agent were fully informed, and yet, still desired to be in agony, then this agent would desire to be in a state which he simultaneously does not want to be in, and thus there is an inherent contradiction, which sufficiently undermines his ability to be seen as a rational agent. Therefore properly understood the agent has a reason to cause it to come about that he not be in agony, and this reason is supplied exclusively by his subject-given desires in conjunction with procedural rationality.

Procedural rationality, as Parfit claims, only appeals to *how* we make our choices, and because it does not appeal to *what* we choose, Parfit believes, by itself, procedural rationality cannot provide normativity. (62) But, as I argue, *how* we choose is the only criterion that subjectivists must appeal to in claiming the categorical necessitation of the desire to avoid all present and future agony. Since agony is simply a physical or mental state which we desire to not be in, any agent who undergoes a process of ideal deliberation necessarily has reasons to avoid any agony. These reasons, contrary to Parfit's claim, are derived from the use of procedural rationality and fully informed desires. Because of this, I believe that we can reject the *Agony Argument* and this undermines the soundness of Parfit's second premise, "Subjectivism implies that we have no reasons [to want to avoid all future agony]." (76)



## Section 2: A Robust Defense of Ideal Deliberation

The *Agony Argument* fails because the desire to avoid agony is categorically demanded of all rational agents. I believe that since we can plausibly claim that there is at least one such demand upon rational agents, then we might presume there are others, and thus we may claim in at least some capacity that there are subject-given reasons generated through categorically necessary desires.

The response above provides a defense of subject-given reasons which avoids the implausible implications of the *Agony Argument*. There are, however, two more critical objections which Parfit levels against deliberative subjective theories; first, that the Humean problem is insufficiently satisfied through deliberation (as seen through the *All or None Argument*), and that subjectivist fundamentally depend upon object-given facts, and thus subjective theories are incoherent (the *Incoherence Argument*). If, however, we return to the theories presented in Chapter 3, I believe that both of these challenges may be met in a plausible manner, and in such a way that appeals only to procedurally subject-given reasons.

When we combine Williams' notion of deliberative priority with that of Smith's concept of categorical necessitation, we can further accommodate Smith's dependence upon systematic justification. When this combination is coupled with a reflective process, such as, Rawls' reflective equilibrium, we may claim the generation of normative reasons which are dependent solely upon our desires and procedural rationality. The resulting theory which combines these principles is one which adopts and modifies Parfit's concept of ideal deliberation, provides a highly plausible account of reasons, and further, avoids any use of substantive rationality.

As presented in Chapter 3, Williams believes that we can assign deliberative priority to desires by correctly using his four point argument. Any desires which satisfy these conditions are able to satisfy the internalism requirement, which as shown by Korsgaard, is a necessary component of plausible accounts of normativity. The argument which Williams presents is dependent upon fully informed desires along with procedural rationality. (i) and (ii) claim that all desires which are informed by false beliefs do not generate reasons, whereas (iii) elaborates upon the types of falsifications provided in (i) and (ii), and claims that beliefs which are either (a) untrue, or (b) ignorant of relevant information, are the specific types of beliefs which when informing our desires do not generate reasons. (i), (ii), and (iii) present the conditions of true belief, and thus provide the characteristics of fully informed desires. The last principle, (iv), on the other hand, is not aimed at what satisfies the requirements of desires being fully informed, but rather about our deliberation of those true beliefs given by (i), (ii), and (iii). (iv) is satisfied through the application of procedural rationality upon the internal desires which are generated through (i) through (iii). When we combine (i) through (iv) we are presented with a model of ideal deliberation which is seemingly identical to the one Parfit outlines: fully informed, and procedurally rational.

Williams' account of rationality, which is also seen to be substantially used in Smith's deliberative theory as well, presents a subject-given solution to the *All or None Argument*. Parfit contends, however, that since subjectivists cannot appeal to substantive rationality, they are unable to claim that some desires generate reasons while others do not. Therefore, according to Parfit, subjectivists cannot avoid the Humean problem without appealing to object-given reasons. This contention is false, however; those desires which depend upon false, or ignorant

beliefs, do not generate reasons since they oppose the desires which we would have if we were fully informed. Through the use of fully informed deliberation Williams believes that we can avoid the claims of the *All or None Argument*. However, it is the very use of fully informed deliberation which provides Parfit with his most substantial critique of subjectivism, and upon which all three of the arguments presented depend. The *All or None Argument*, the *Agony Argument*, and all other critiques of subjectivism which Parfit raises, only go through if the *Incoherence Argument* is correct in its claim that subjectivists inherently depend upon object-given facts. Therefore I will devote the final analysis of subjective theories to the task of showing that the *Incoherence Argument* fails to motivate a substantial devaluation of Subjectivity.

The *Incoherence Argument* is the most substantial argument against subjective theories proposed by Parfit, since it is upon the claims drawn from this argument that all other challenges Parfit presents against subjectivism are dependent. If Subjective theories can generate normativity without substantive rationality, and thus object-given facts, then the *Incoherence*, *Agony*, and *All or None* arguments are all incapable of undermining subjective normativity.

Subject-based theories are limited to the ways in which we make our choices, but, as I have argued, there are necessary constraints placed upon the choices of any rational agent. As previously shown, when we are using a process of ideal deliberation, we must utilize Williams' concept of deliberative priority. Deliberative Priority is necessary for Subjective theories, since it allows for the internalization of the desires which we would have if we were fully informed. These internalized, fully informed desires allow subjectivists to claim the normative power of

some desires while rejecting others, as non-normative. Therefore through the use of ideal deliberation, subjectivists can formulate a plausible response to the Humean Problem, and thus avoid the *Agony Argument*.

There is, however, according to Parfit, an inability for subjectivists to use ideal deliberation in subject-given accounts of normativity, since fully informed deliberation depends upon object, not subject-given reasons, and this undermines subjectivism from the outset. Through the *Incoherence Argument* Parfit claims that all appeals to fully informed mental or physical states, are actually appeals to the facts which provide these states, and thus are dependent on relative reason implying facts, and therefore not subject-given. Although I have argued previously that in certain regards the *Incoherence Argument* can plausibly run the other way as well, I believe that there is a more substantial response which subjectivists can provide that is given exclusively through procedural rationality.

Subjectivism is incoherent, according to Parfit, since it must use fully informed deliberation to avoid the Humean problem, and in doing so necessitates the use of object-given facts. This, however, is false. Subjective theories necessitate the use of three concepts in providing reasons, namely desires, procedural rationality, and pre-analytic moral intuitions, and these should be seen as corresponding respectively with deliberative priority, the unity of desires, and reflective equilibrium.

It has already been shown how Williams' notion of deliberative priority fits into the structure of ideal deliberation. Deliberative priority provides the framework in which we can understand desires as generating reasons in some instances and yet incapable of normativity in others. So we can loosely view deliberative priority as giving the foundation for subjective

normativity, but we must incorporate Smith's account of the unity of desires and systematic justification, which will then necessitate the use of Rawls' reflective equilibrium, in order to understand how we can avoid the claim that the fully informed nature of ideal deliberation is object-given.

If procedural rationality is able to provide us with the necessary components of normativity without appealing to object-given reasons, it must incorporate desire in such a way that our rational deliberation depends upon universal or categorical desires.<sup>32</sup> Subjective theories must produce plausible examples of necessary desires incumbent upon all rational agents, because if they fail in this task, then subjective theories must depend upon categorical demands of another kind; relevant reason-implicating facts. I believe that the desire to avoid agony, whenever possible, is, however, one such desire, as already stated, and as I have already shown, this desire seems to be a desire that is not, as Parfit claims, dependent upon object-given reasons. If we use Parfit's definition of rationality, and claim that "our desires are not rational, and are in the old phrase *contrary to reason*, when we want some event that we have reasons *not* to want," (56) we can see that a desire for future agony is irrational.

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<sup>32</sup> My use of the concept of categorical desires is in significant ways different than that of the subjective thinkers which I address, such as, that of Williams. In his paper, "Persons, character and morality" Williams presents a view of categorical desires which are categorical because they are necessary for an agent to remain alive. As Williams says, "Some desires are admittedly contingent on the prospect of one's being alive, but not all desires can be in that sense conditional, since it is possible to imagine a person rationally contemplating suicide, in the face of some predicted evil, and if he decides to go on in life, then he is propelled forward into it by some desire (however general or incoherent) which cannot operate conditionally of his being alive, since it settles the question of whether he is going to be alive. Such a desire we may call a categorical desire," Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality," 11.

The view of categorical necessary desires which I use, in contrast to that of Williams', claims that there are specific desires incumbent upon all agents, if we are to view them as rational agents. There may be corresponding categorical desires which are needed for us to have a possible future, but these are not my focus. Instead when I use the term categorical, I mean that there are certain desires, which, if we did not possess, would result in our failure to be acting rationally in any coherent sense, and thus would render us not only irrational, but incapable of claiming a plausible account of agency.

The desire for future agony is irrational, like Parfit claims, but it is not because it is dependent upon object-given reasons, we need not appeal to anything other than Smith's idea of categorical demands of rationality. If there are requirements of rationality, then it would seem an obvious one that desiring to be in a state which by its very definition is not a state which we can desire is irrational. With an understanding of at least this one categorical desire, we can then work to extrapolate derivative desires which must accompany the desire to avoid agony, and which are then unified under a common set. The way in which Smith views this process of unifying sets of desires is to apply a more general desire that "justifies and explains the more specific desires that we have." (S159) As we attempt to unify desires under a more systematically justifiable set of desires, we imagine those desires that would be necessary for unity. This depends upon evaluative beliefs about what our desires would be if we were fully rational, and any desire that is acquired in this manner is done so "precisely because it is believed to be required for us to be rational." (S160)

Therefore, the desires which we acquire through our evaluative beliefs are those which align with what we believe to be rational desires. This process of unity replaces the use of fully informed thought in ideal deliberation, since it appeals not to what some present or future facts tell us we should desire, but rather what we believe to be the desires which are most rational in a given situation. It may still be possible to insist upon fully informed desires, but this move makes it unnecessary, and actually seems to be more plausible for an actual account of reasons. If we can avoid an appeal to error-free, or fully informed desires, we can avoid the necessitation of substantive facts, since we do not need factual justification for our desires, but

rather only rational beliefs. Through a combination of procedural rationality, and evaluative beliefs we can generate normative reasons.

Admittedly, Objectivists, such as Parfit, will reject the theory of normativity outlined above, since if our evaluative beliefs are either false, based on ignorance, or lacking relevant facts, then they may give us reasons which do not align with those produced through fully informed desires. Because desires which are not fully informed may be influenced by the lack of relevant facts, and thus capable of being, if not contrary, then at least not in alignment with the desires which we would have if we were fully informed, Parfit thinks we should insist upon the fully informed demand of DT. However, I believe that Subjectivists can appeal to another claim which would allow for not only an explanation of how we can account for the lack of relevant facts, but allows us to avoid an appeal to fully informed desires, and thus Parfit's most substantial critique of subjectivism.

The major flaw in the subjective theory which I have outlined above, is that, as it stands, there is no way to resolve the fact that desires which are formulated out of the lack of being fully informed may sometimes be contrary to the desires which we would have when influenced by all of the relevant reason-implying facts. This dependence upon relevant facts is, however, a need for the justification of *objective* theories. Subjective theories, contrarily, are not dependent upon facts. However, since subjective theories need not appeal to facts, they must justify a view of normativity which depends exclusively upon evaluative desires in conjunction with procedural rationality, and this is provided by Rawls' notion of reflective equilibrium.

Smith's account of unity gives us the ability to claim categorical desires which can be derived through procedural rationality. Yet, because we also have other desires which are not categorical demands of reason, but are nevertheless unified under these categorical desires, we must have a way to justify reasons based upon these subsequent desires. The categorical demands of reason, such as the desire to avoid agony, when possible, are the same as those desires which we would have if fully informed. Yet, the desires which are unified under, such categorical desires, may however, change if we were fully informed, and so we need a principle which, derived exclusively from deliberation, may provide reasons.

Reflective equilibrium is just such a principle since it allows for a reflective justification of desires strictly through aligning those desires, or bringing them into with our pre-analytic moral intuitions. Parfit claims that we need to incorporate substantive rationality to avoid the possibility that we would have reasons, based upon desires, which cause events that are in fact bad for us. Since procedural rationality is concerned with how we choose, and Parfit believes we must also incorporate what we choose into normativity, he rejects subjective theories. Reflective equilibrium offers, however, a way for subjectivists to appeal to what we choose, yet purely in a procedurally rational way. Desires, which are generated through the procedural means sketched above, can be justified by examining what they demand in contrast to what we believe our pre-analytic moral intuitions demand of us.

When we arrive at a unified set of desires, we can ask what this set asks of us, and then compare these demands with our basic intuitions. Since these intuitions are not based upon facts, but are themselves further based upon what we believe to be rationally required of us, we must appeal only to procedural rationality. But, when we enter into this reflective process



we do so by asking what our desires demand, and whether, when compared to our basic intuitions, if this seems like a rational demand. Therefore, in using reflective equilibrium as a metric guide to judge whether what we desire is rational, we satisfy the same criterion as that of substantive rationality, and yet avoid any necessitation of appeals to object-given reasons.

By unifying desires as a cohesive set, we include only those desires which we believe to be rationally required of us, and further, we can internalize those desires through the process of ascribing deliberative priority. We would then have rational and motivational reasons to act upon the desires generated in this way, and we can then examine the desires in a given set, and check them against our basic intuitions and this allows us to further justify these desires based upon what they demand of us.

As I have claimed, I believe that subjectivists can rework DT in a significant way by rejecting the need for fully informed desire. This is justified, since we can adopt in its place the unity of desires under the categorical necessitation of basic desires. When we unify desires under these categorically required desires, and assign deliberative priority to sets of desires, we can generate subjective reasons which avoid the challenges of *the Agony* and *All or None Arguments*. The desires which are created in this way can then be examined and compared with our pre-analytic moral intuitions through a reflective process which seeks equilibrium between what our desires and moral intuitions demand of us. The process of reflective equilibrium allows us to remove the demand of substantive rationality, and allows us to refute the *Incoherence Argument*, since through this process there is no need for the use of object-given facts. Therefore, we should reject the three arguments presented by Parfit, as well as the falsity of subjectivity which Parfit claims. Through the use of procedural rationality, pre-analytic

moral intuitions, and subject-given desires, subjectivists can provide a sufficiently plausible and coherent response to Parfit, and thus I believe negate the concerns raised by Parfit.

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## **VITA**

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